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**THE MEANING OF RELIGION IN LIVES OF  
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN GEORGIA**  
*A Salutogenic Perspective*

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed to describe the meaning of religion in the lives of Orthodox Christians in Georgia through salutogenic perspective. Wittingly, to what degree people's descriptions of their experience with religion suggest that it contributes to well-being, through its influence on the Sense of Coherence (SOC), and which aspects of people's experience with religion contribute to well-being. The work definition of religion used in this research was: religion as a cognitive, emotional, valuative-attitudinal, interpersonal-relational and macrosociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society (textural meaning) that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors and thus preventing tension from being transformed into stress (structural meaning).

This qualitative study applying phenomenological approach and involving eight Orthodox Christians was conducted in Georgia. Eight orthodox Christians regardless age, gender, marital status or educational background, were selected from different laities. The criteria such as age, gender, professional status or church belonging were not used in this research due to the ethical issues. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of this study, and assured their agreement by signing the inform consent. In-depth face-to-face interviews were planned for this research. Interview guide used in this research consisted from two parts. The first part included of open-ended questions on the topic of general notion of religion and what role does it play in participant's life. This part was aimed to gather the data on the participant's personal experience of being in religion, e.g. life history analysis. The second part of the interview guide included the questions for measuring Sense of Coherence, modified from a written questionnaire to an oral interview guide by the researcher's supervisor Maurice Mittelmark. Interviews with the permission of participants were audio recorded. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Tbilisi State Medical University Biomedical Research Ethics Committee and Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services.

The immense role of religion as one of the generalized resistance resources (GRRs) is reflected in the textural meaning of work definition of religion used in this research. Degree of its influence to what do people's descriptions of their experience with religion contributes to well-being through SOC, by using faith as tool, is reflected in the structural meaning. Participants mostly referred to faith, concretely, to endowed by religion meaningful and comprehensive answers for the questions they had, as one of the coping strategies. Faith takes action as a basic tool of spirituality, which is shaped by religiousness in these people. Being embedded in social network, which was mostly presented as church, participants had a positive attitude to the priests, with some consideration being given to those ones, who were the good sources for the answers on the question that participants had. In Georgian context, where 83% of citizens are Orthodox Christians, experiencing historical events that expose a chronic stress, together with the increasing role of the Church and lack of research, knowledge about religion as one of GRRs may be of main importance for enabling individuals and communities to make the decisions, which improve their health.

*Keywords: religion, spirituality, Orthodox Christians, generalized resistance resources (GRRs), sense of coherence (SOC), well-being.*

*Si quelqu'un veut un mouton, c'est la preuve qu'il en existe un.*

If someone wants a sheep, that is a proof that one exists.

*Antoine de Saint Exupéry, "Le Petit Prince"*

# CHAPTER ONE

## *Introduction*

The role of religion in the lives of specific individuals, societies and nations is different: some of them live by strict rules of religion, while others offer complete freedom in matters of faith to their citizens and do not interfere into the religious sphere, in some societies and nations it may be banned altogether. Nevertheless, a growing body of research has examined both religious and spiritual concepts for their relationship to health, which has been of longstanding interest in the health, social and behavioural sciences. In addition, spirituality with various definitions of it becomes the focus of a number of recent books, journal articles, and conferences (1).

Despite methodological and analytical issues, generally the findings point to a dependable and salutary influence of religious factors on individual and population health (2-4). Moreover, in the fields of health education and health promotion the concepts of spirituality and spiritual health are discussed and incorporated into notions of overall health (4, 5). George et al. quote the National Institute of Healthcare Research (NIHR) panel, which defined spirituality as “the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred” (6, p.104). Apropos, “sacred” refers to “a divine being, higher power, or ultimate reality, as perceived by the individual” (6, p.104). The NIHR’s definition of religion or religiousness includes two criteria. The first considers religiousness as a result of a search for the sacred, which is identical to spirituality; or as a search for non-sacred goals in a context where the primary goal is a search for the sacred. The second

criterion is that “the means and methods for the search receive validation and support from an identifiable collectivity” (6, p.104). In other words, religion is characterized by its collective reinforcement and identity either. Thus, the “search for the sacred” helps to distinguish both spirituality and religion from other social and personal phenomena (6). However, these terms are not equal. Spirituality is considered as a part of the broad concept of religion, due to religion is being subdivided into religiousness and spirituality (1).

The period from 1988 until the present has been very hard for Georgia: Georgian Civil War consisted of inter-ethnic and intranational conflicts in the regions of South Ossetia (1988–1992) and Abkhazia (1992–1993); the violent military coup d’état of December 21, 1991 - January 6, 1992 against the first President of Georgia and his subsequent uprising in an attempt to regain power (1993); the Rose Revolution in 2003; the conflict with escalation in South Ossetia in 2008 (7, 8). Arnold R. Isaacs, a long-time reporter and editor of *The Baltimore Sun*, in his “Post-Soviet Blues: Georgian sketches” writes: “I had come to think of Georgia as a traumatized society, battered into numbness and despair by the events that had befallen it, just as an individual can be emotionally damaged by traumatic experiences”(9). Rutz outlines, that because of the societal stress in Eastern Europe countries a societal community syndrome can be found, which consist of morbidity and mortality related to stress and mental ill health (10). The loss of dignity, identity and status, the helplessness, the loss of being in charge of one’s own life, the loss of values, the losing of social connectedness, as well as the lack of existential cohesion and meaning in life form the background for the dramatic changes in societies by Rutz (10).

A word view, which is “never merely a vision *of* life is always a vision *for* life as well”, provides “a model *of the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*” (11, p.31-32). The world views are always shared and community is “possible only when people are bound together by a common way of life rooted in a shared vision of life” (11, p.32). 83% of citizens of Georgia are Orthodox Christians (12). The wisdom they believe and adhere is based on *Beatitudes* (Blessings) contained in Matthew 5:3-12, which add *Decalogue* (Ten Commandments) and teach how to achieve Christian perfection. The last is based on love, humility and gratitude (13-18). In 2002 a Constitutional Agreement between the government and the Orthodox Church of Georgia was signed. According to this agreement, the government and the Church should be entitled to implement social security, support, and educational joint programmes (19)<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, in 2004, new National Anthem *Tavisupleba*<sup>2</sup> was adopted. The first couplet of this anthem states: “My *icon* is my *motherland*, And *icon-stand* is *whole the world*, Bright mounts and valleys *Are shared with God*” [researcher’s italics] (20). Considering the fact that the main function of each anthem is patriotic empowerment of the citizens; on the one hand, this kind of lyrics lead to think about the autocracy of Church in Georgia. On the other hand, this fact together with the mentioned above Constitutional Agreement point out the importance of religion in Georgian everyday life.

Interviewing Israeli women with experiences from the concentration camps after World War II who despite this stayed healthy, Antonovsky identified three conditions a) wish to cope (meaningfulness); b) belief that the challenge is understood (comprehensibility); c) belief that resources to cope are available (manageability). He

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<sup>1</sup> translated from Georgian by the researcher

<sup>2</sup> Freedom (Georgian)



identified them as a Sense of Coherence (SOC) that is a meaningful relationship of an individual and the world, and developed the theory of Salutogenesis, which “studies health instead of disease” (21-22). According to this theory, all people are to some extent healthy, and the main point of it is “what explains movement toward the health pole of the health ease/dis-ease continuum”. (21, p.15) Linley considers wisdom as a positive adaptation to trauma and reveals a consistency of approach between the wisdom and SOC (14). Even though the researcher in Georgia found no research on the question of health-religion connection, these historical events, which expose chronic stress, together with the increasing role of the Church in that society lead to study the health-religion connection from salutogenic perspective.

### ***Purpose of the Study & Research Objectives***

With the above considerations, the purpose of this study is to describe the meaning of religion in the lives of Orthodox Christians in Georgia, by addressing two study questions:

- (1) To what degree do people's descriptions of their experience with religion suggest that it contributes to well-being, through its influence on SOC?
- (2) Which aspects of people's experience with religion contribute to well-being, either via SOC or via other paths?

## ***Literature review & Theoretical Framework***

As it was written above, religion/spirituality with various definitions of it becomes the focus of a number of recent books, journal articles, and conferences (1). Zinnbauer et al. place three basic aspects of traditional psychological writings on religion: religion from both substantive and functional perspectives; emphasis on personal aspects of religiousness; and the possibility of positive and negative forms of faith (1).

Currently, however, traditionally broad and balanced characterizations of religiousness and spirituality are replaced by narrower and more polarized definitions, and as a result, this area of inquiry loses its focus (1). Religion is being subdivided into religiousness and spirituality (1). Therefore, three peculiar forms of religion can be considered: 1) *organized religiousness versus personal spirituality* (in which religiousness is defined as “a system of organized beliefs and worship which a person practices,” and spirituality is defined as “a personal life principle which animates a transcendent quality of relationship with God” (Emblen cited in 1, p. 901); 2) *substantive religiousness versus functional spirituality* (spirituality as “the human dimension that transcends the biological, psychological, and social aspects of living” (Mauritzen cited in 1, p 902); religiousness increasingly linked to institutions, formalized belief, and group practices, may be peripheral to these functional tasks (Pargament cited in 1, p.902); 3) *mundane harmful religiousness versus lofty helpful spirituality* (religious “implies too strongly the enormous social structures that embrace so many more things than direct spiritual experience”, and spiritual “implies more directly the experience that people have about the meaning of life, God, ways to live, etc” (Tart cited in 1, p.902). Pargament outlines that “religious pathways include various ways of thinking (e.g. theologies, beliefs), behaving (e.g. rituals, practices),

relating (e.g. congregations, fellowships), and feeling (e.g. awe, ecstasy)” (23, p.169).

On the base of these forms, **spirituality is the human dimension, a personal life principle, which transcends the biological, psychological, and social aspects of living, and implies the experience that people have about the meaning of life, God, ways to live, etc. Religiousness is a system of organized beliefs and worship which a person or a group practice** (1). In other words, spirituality is “*what*” to believe and religiousness is “*how*” to believe. This polarization makes understanding of the meaning of religion and based on the correlation of spirituality and religiousness (more, less or equal) different forms of it possible within the notion of religion. However, it also may yield only a limited understanding of the concepts of spirituality and religiousness (1). For that reason, in recent literature the terms ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘religiousness’ are often overlap each other and are used as synonymises.

Studies on the religion/physical health connection suggest that religion usually plays a positive role, however, the processes by which these relationships occur are poor understood (2, 24, 25). The positive effects of religious and spiritual experience on health are based on a supposition that the experience itself is positive and healthy (26). Gartner reviewed the literature and found positive and negative associations between religion (spirituality) and well-being, marital satisfaction, general psychological functioning, suicide, delinquency, criminal behaviour, and drug and alcohol use (27, 28). Religion has also been associated with some forms of psychopathology, including authoritarianism, rigidity, dogmatism, suggestibility, and dependence (27). Van Ness and Larson studied relationship between religion/spirituality and mental health in people at the end of life and noticed that religious persons reported generally higher levels of well-being (29). Spirituality was

considered one of the determinants of health in a group of disabled people, which can provide a catalyst for the individual for rehabilitation (30). Sloan et al. states that “past reviews have been overly optimistic” and “suggestions that religious activity will promote health are unwarranted” (31, p.667). However, Powell et al. in their evidence, based on nine hypotheses about the link between religion/spirituality and mortality, morbidity, disability and recovery, argue that there is a strong and prospective reduction in risk of mortality in church adherents (32).

Religious and spiritual factors as positive emotions might benefit the individual through their impact on neural pathways that connect to the endocrine and immune systems (25, 26, 32). Negative emotions can lead to stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal axis (HPA), systems involved in mobilizing energy during stress (24, 26, 33). This excitability can produce a stress response and excessive release of the norepinephrine and of the cortisol, which can lead to inhibition of the immune system, risk of infection, hypertension, impaired healing response, and risk of the stroke and heart attack (24, 26, 33). Meditation, forgiveness, and certain spiritual thoughts might reduce the arousal in the SNS and HPA (24, 26, 33), increasing immune competence and restoring physiological stability (24, 26, 33). In addition, social support can influence health outcomes (e.g., cardiovascular and infectious diseases) via a number of physiological processes (24, 26, 33).

Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion states that “health promotion strategies and programmes should be adapted to the local needs and possibilities of individual countries and regions to take into account differing social, cultural and economic

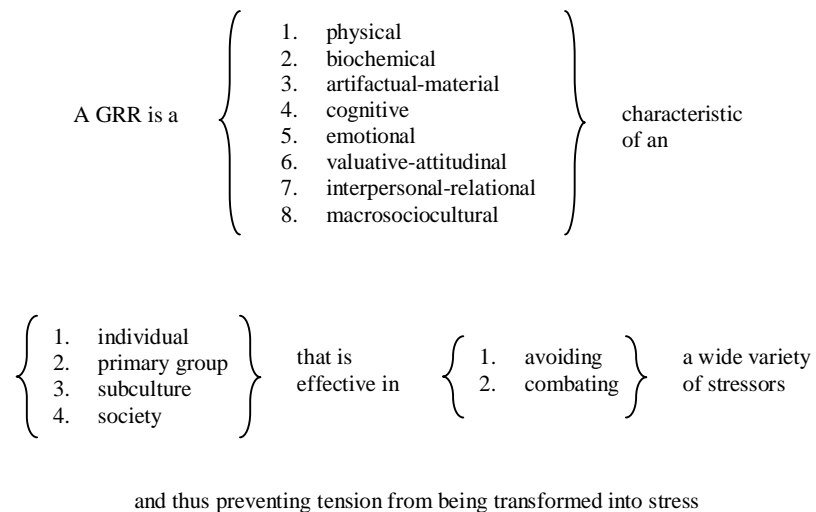
systems” (34). The relationship of culture to health beliefs and practices, and the explanations for health and disease, which characterize that beliefs, can be seen as highly complex, dynamic and interactive, due to these explanations often involve family, community, and/or supernatural agents in cause and effect, placation, and treatment rituals to prevent, control or cure illness (35).

Interviewing Israeli women with experiences from the concentration camps who despite this stayed healthy Antonovsky identified three conditions: a) wish to cope (*meaningfulness*); b) belief that the challenge is understood (*comprehensibility*); c) belief that resources to cope are available (*manageability*). These three conditions form the **Sense of Coherence** (SOC), which is a “global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one’s internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected” (22, p.123). This sense is the central concept of the Salutogenesis theory, according to which all people are to some extent healthy, and the main point of it is “what explains movement toward the health pole of the health ease/dis-ease continuum” (21, p.15).

Herein, the **stressor** by Antonovsky is defined as “a demand made by the internal or external environment of an organism that upsets its homeostasis, restoration of which depends on a nonautomatic and not readily available energy-expending action” (22, p.72). Throughout the lifespan human beings are subject to a huge variety of stressors, to which they response by **tension**. This tension can be negative, which leads to *dis-ease* pole of health continuum, neutral, or salutary that leads to *ease*. Therefore, the direction of this tension within health ease/dis-ease continuum depends on the **tension**

**management.** As the determinants of successful tension management Antonovsky proposes **generalized resistance resources (GRRs)**, such as material, ego identity, knowledge, intelligence, coping strategy, social support, commitment, cultural stability, magic, religion/philosophy, and a preventive health orientation (22, 36). Table one outlines common features of GRRs (22, p.103).

*Table 1. Mapping-sentence definition of a GRR (22, p.103)*



The GRRs are of genetic, constitutional and psychological characters, are shaped by recently experienced life events, and are characterised by their role in shaping outcome, and a balance between “*underload*” and “*overload*” (36). The key factor is how to use and re-use them in order to reinforce the SOC (37). Persons with a strong SOC are likely to identify a greater variety of GRRs at their disposal (36-38). In other words, when the persons perceive themselves and the world, feel themselves as a creator and create something meaningful, feel a sense of support, they have more chances to become healthier physically, mentally, socially, and do not break under the

weight of life's trials. Antonovsky considers the absence of a GRR as a stressor, as well as "providers of negative entropy" (22, pp. 119-122).

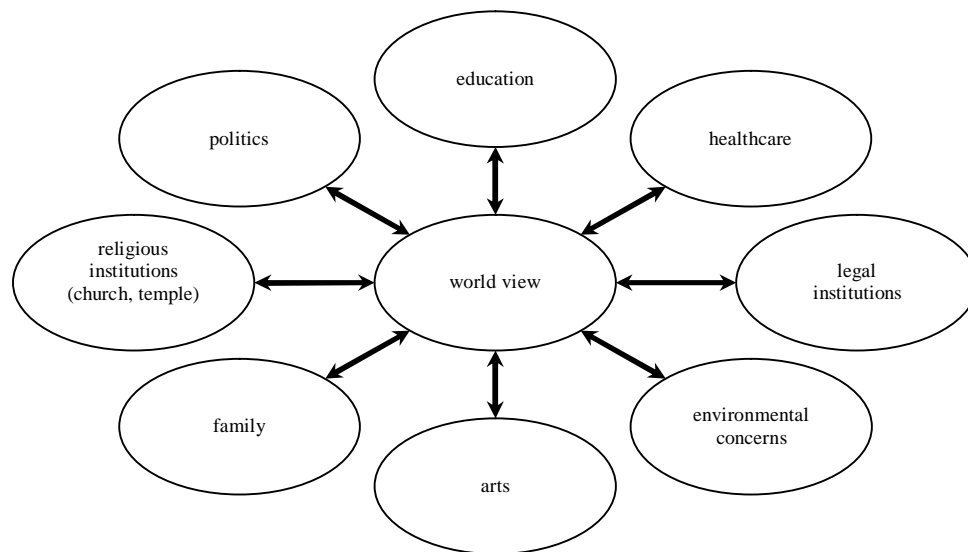
Due to diverse demands of the people, Antonovsky identifies three categories of GRRs: adaptability, profound ties and ties between an individual and his total community (38). The sociological aspect of *adaptability* is "the availability of a complex role set in which the individual has the freedom to enter those roles which he finds suit him best, and the freedom to modify the norms governing those roles in terms of his needs" (38, p.542). However, *profound ties* indicate for "a person who has someone who cares for him is likely to more adequately resolve tension than one who does not" (38, p.542). The *ties between the individual and s/his total community* are influential resistance resources. One pointer of these ties might be "the extent to which a society holds as a central value that the society as such, rather than the individual alone, is responsible for dealing with threat, or for assisting the individual to do so" (38, p.542).

To understand these categories of GRRs, it is important to consider Orthodox Ideology and based on it worldview "that is, an Orthodox view on the whole of life, not just on narrow church subjects ... one can be like anyone else, participating in the life and culture of our times without any problem, as long as we don't commit sin" (39, para.4). Walsh & Middleton define a worldview as "never merely a vision *of* life, it is always a vision *for* life as well ... A word view, then, provides a model *of the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*" (11, p.31-32). The worldviews are always shared and community is "possible only when people are bound together by a common way of life rooted in a shared vision of life" (11, p.32). According to them, all the different aspects of a culture are aroused out of and are directed by the

worldview of that culture. That is what makes those different aspects of the culture “hang together” (11). These different aspects are clearly presented in the model (fig.1).

According to this figure, cultural life is not only “*rooted* in the dominant world view; it also *orients* life in terms of that world view” (both ways arrows) (11)<sup>3</sup>. Emphasising the importance of language as essential communicating factor in sharing worldviews, the authors suggest that the beginning of this ‘circle’ is founded on ultimate faith commitments, which are the answers for four basic questions individual has.

Fig.1: Interrelationship of world view and culture (11)



These questions are; *Who am I?* (the nature, task and purpose of human beings); *Where am I?* (the nature of the world and universe the individual lives in); *What’s wrong?* (the basis problem or obstacle that keeps the individual from attaining

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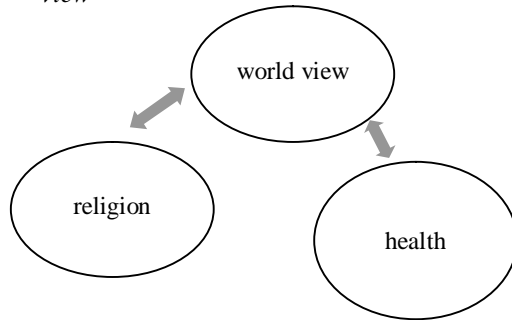
<sup>3</sup> All emphasis in original



fulfilment, or how does the individual understand evil); *What is the remedy?*

(possibility(s) to overcome this hindrance to one's fulfilment) (11).

*Fig.2: Bi-relation of religion/health's to world view*

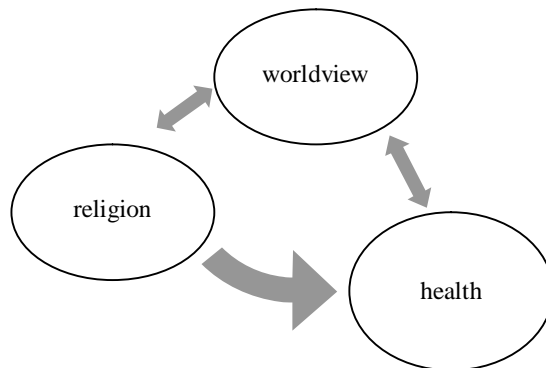


According to WHO, the determinants of health include socio-economic and physical environment, as well as person's individual characteristics and behaviours (40). These determinants lead for further

thinking and allow uniting mentioned in fig.1 aspects (except 'religious institutions', which will be presented below as religion) in one broad concept, which is health.

Therefore, the modified model of interrelationship of worldview and culture might

*Fig.3: Spiritual well-being (religion) as a component of health*



consist of two aspects: religion and health, whit their bi-relation to world view (fig.2).

Considering described above religion/spirituality connection to health, the next step leads to emphasise that connection.

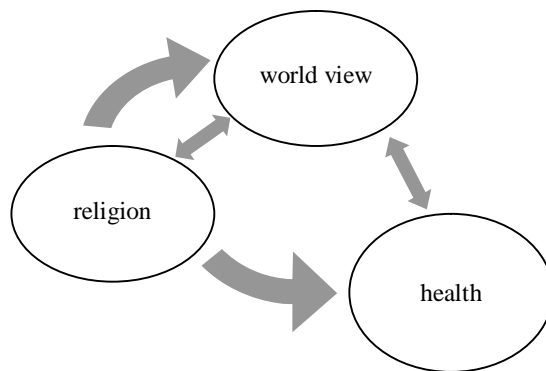
If spirituality is the human dimension that goes beyond the

biological, psychological, and social aspects of living (1), which “an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment” where health is seen as a “resource for

everyday life, not the objective of living” (40), therefore, health might be the state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. Graphically it can be presented by putting an arrow from ‘religion’ to ‘health’ (fig.3).

Levin presents religious involvement along with the ways in which they can lead to health in eight dimensions, which represent different aspects of ‘being religious or practicing religion’ (41, p.859). They include religious commitment; religion-ethnic identity; religious involvement and friendship; religious worship and prayer; religious and theological beliefs and worldviews; religious faith; religious, spiritual and mystical or supernatural experience; and religious obedience (41, p.859). Based on this, religion is considered as a complex meaning consisting of spirituality and religiousness, and this meaning is relative and covers mentioned above three categories of resources and closely linked to them ultimate faith commitments.

*Fig.4: Connection of word view to health*



Concretely, adaptability is related to the nature, task and purpose of human beings and the nature of the world individual lives in. The profound ties and ties between individual and s/his total community include all commitments. This leads for

further modification by putting another arrow from ‘religion’ to ‘world view’ (fig.4). The last stage in this modified religion/world view/health understanding model is to identify how ‘world view’ is connected to ‘health’.

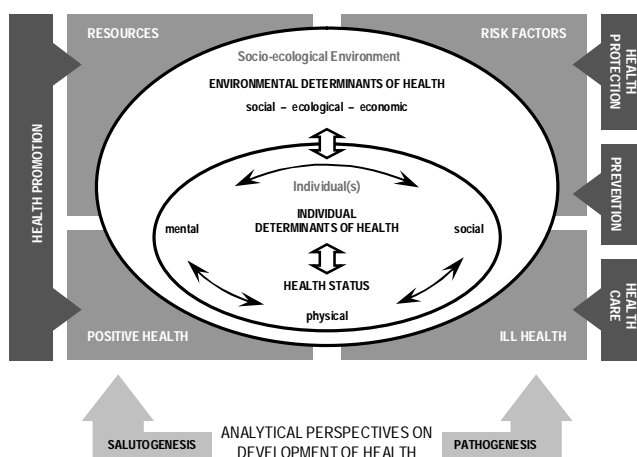
In profound ties, Antonovsky indicates for “a person who has someone who cares for him is likely to more adequately resolve tension than one who does not” (38, p.542). Doubtless, it indicates as to the meaning of God, divine being, higher power, or ultimate reality, as well how the individual perceives this meaning. Such an indication could be a starting point in understanding religion as one of the generalized resistance resources. From this point of view, **religion** might be **a cognitive, emotional, valiative-attitudinal, interpersonal-relational, macrosociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society, that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors and thus preventing tension from being transformed into stress**. This understanding is planned to be used as the work definition of religion in this research project.

By the **cognitive** characteristic Antonovsky implies knowledge-intelligence in the broadest cognitive sense to embody “both a storehouse of information about the real world and skills that facilitate acquiring such knowledge” (22, p.107). **Emotional** characteristic is outlined as ego identity, which “refers to a picture of oneself” (22, p.109). **Valiative-attitudinal** factors are essentially individual by him, which “may bring to bear in coping with a variety of stressors”, i.e. coping styles or strategies – “a plan for behavior, not the behavior that eventually results to cope with the stressor” (22, p.110-113). **Interpersonal-relational** is presented as a social support and commitment, particularly as an “extent to which one is embedded in social networks to which one is committed” (22, p.116). Finally, by **macrosociocultural** characteristics Antonovsky outlines the role of one’s culture in providing “ready answers and its social structure” (22, p.119).

As human beings are open systems, the individual's worldview is not static. It is always shared with others and is shaped by life experience from different circumstances. Thus, whether and how can these changes in individual's worldview lead to health, or “*ease*” by Antonovsky. The answer might be in SOC, the “generalized, long-lasting way of seeing the world and one's life in it...a picture of the one's world, which, of course, includes the self” (22, pp.110, 124).

With these considerations, the salutogenic theoretical framework is most appropriate for this research. Graphically this framework can be presented as fig.5 at p.20 (adapted and modified from yet to be published model from the “Introduction to Salutogenesis” lecture of Professor M. Mittelmark). Furthermore taking in consideration that Antonovsky proposed the salutogenic model as a theory to guide

Fig.6: EUHPID Health Development Model (42)



health promotion (21), this fact allows constructing research in this field. In addition, the European Community Health Promotion Indicator Development (EUHPID) Project developed a model as a basis for establishing a

European set of indicators for monitoring health promotion interventions (42).

Suggested as a common frame of reference, this model is an object lesson to show the place of present research in health field (fig.6).



## CHAPTER TWO

### *Methodology*

As the purpose of this research is describing the meaning of religion as one of the GRRs in lives of particular group of people, this qualitative study applies phenomenological approach. According to Creswell, the focus of phenomenology is in “describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (43, p.58), and “it would be remiss not to include some discussion about the philosophical presuppositions of phenomenology” (43, p.59). Therefore, the basics of phenomenology are discussed below.

### *What is & Why Phenomenology*

Chiu et al. consider spirituality is a “universal human phenomenon” (44). However, “human beings make sense of their place in the world” and “behave in ways that are not determined in law-like ways”, thus, this research is aimed to understand the “world from the point of view of participants in it” (44). This leads to the necessity of some type of theory of cognition, which will able to give clear, and, therefore, a consistent understanding of the researching subject and capabilities of its implementation. Edmund Husserl in his “The Idea of Phenomenology”<sup>4</sup> defines phenomenology as a general doctrine of an essence, which includes a science of a nature of cognition (46). He states, if the theory of cognition intends to refer to the possibility of particular knowledge, then it should have cognition about the

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<sup>4</sup> translated from Russian by the researcher

opportunities of knowledge, which in the strict sense, are characterized by reliability, and 'their' own possibilities of knowledge, credibility of which is assured (46). As a start point he presents 'doubt viewing' (*Zweifelsbetrachtung*), which is the first absolute given: being of *cogitatio* and knowledge in the process of experience with a simple reflection on it are undoubted (46). To the 'doubt viewing', he adds 'basic cognitive and theoretical reflection': how could some sort of being be grasped in cognition, and why do not *cogitationes* have this conviction and this difficulty (46). To answer this question Husserl places two meanings: immanence, which is 'inside' (i.e. 'I have the right to use'); and transcendence (i.e. 'I have not the right to use'), which is 'outside' of 'me' (46). Thus, if 'I wish to see the essence of the possibilities of this perception and to examine the way to make it granted, I have to make a phenomenological reduction', in other words, to exclude all the transcendental statements (46). This 'Nonentity' (*Nullität*) leads to stay with things (*Zu den Sachen*), which are questionable, and allows disassociate problems 'ad hoc' with completely different problems (46).

The next step of phenomenological reduction is to reduce the 'doubt viewing', which leads to reduce immanence in order to receive pure basic questions: how can the pure phenomenon of cognition overtake something that is not immanent to it; how can the absolute self-evidence of cognition understand some non-self-reality; and how this comprehension is to be understood (46). Based on these directions logical operations, like comparing, distinguishing, subsuming under the concept, predicating etc, can be made. Although, on this stage is still not clear how can the valid establishments of the needed sort be made. Here is necessary a concept of 'Ideation' which is focused directly on the consciousness of 'universal' and is a method of contemplation of

‘universal’ as well (46). Thus, by phenomenological reduction Husserl means excluding of transcendence at all, which shows the way to an ‘absolute datum’ of pure discretion (46). Hence, the study should keep its’ pure discretion, viz. research of essence (*eidōs*), which’s field is ‘apriori’ within the absolute self-evidence (46). The most important level of phenomenological reduction is to raise all these statements up to universal consciousness. At this level the meanings ‘appearance’ and ‘appearing’ oppose themselves within the ‘pure evidence’ (46). The reason of this opposing is ‘Now’ (*Jetzt*) concept, which shows the way to two absolute datum: the presence of ‘appearing’ (*Erscheinendes*) and the presence of ‘appearance’ (*Erscheinung*), i.e. ‘tomorrow-appearance’ is not ‘yesterday-appearance’, these ‘appearances’ by Husserl are the ‘things’ (*Sachen*), which are not the parts of ‘appearing’ due to they are not included in ‘Now’ (46). Thus, according to Husserl, the word phenomenon means *appearing*, instead of widely used *appearance*. It means a continuing process, which Husserl outlines as a ‘life-world’ (*Lebenswelt*) (46). The ‘life-world’, which is neither mental nor physical, refers to the ‘appearances’ that human beings live through before they acknowledge (46). This referring makes the ‘life-world’, on the one hand a kind of ‘depot’ of everyday lived experience (‘appearances’), to which humans always return to as to reference, and renew the reserves by another lived experience(s). On the other hand, this renewing makes it a kind of ‘torrent’ as well (46). Deeply understanding of these philosophical concepts is significant, due to the direct relation to the further parts of this research, such as data collection, management and analysis, and validity. This understanding allows reducing biases and makes the salutogenic framework most appropriative for this study.



## ***Researcher's role***

The collected data for qualitative research can be interpreted in different ways due to “both research and researchers are part of the world, and there is no privileged place we can occupy from which to study that world objectively” (45, p.23). In addition, the importance of the researcher's role in qualitative research is not only to collect the data (47), the researcher becomes an instrument for data analyse as well. Therefore, this part of the research together with the considered above philosophical presuppositions of phenomenology is directly connected to the issues of subjectivity of this study by defying possible bias and influencing effects caused by the researcher's personality. Due to the researcher's previous background in General Medicine and Public Health, the data related to religion/spirituality might be accepted sceptically. On the other hand, understanding of discussed above biological and pathogenic pathways reduces the sceptical view. Being religious himself, fluent in Georgian and Russian, and collecting data in researcher's native site facilitates the in-depth interview process and reduces the power-imbalances between the researcher and participants. However, these factors can also be considered as bias. All these characteristics are evident in favour of choosing the theoretic/philosophical framework.

## ***Data collection and management***

**Participants.** Eight orthodox Christians regardless age, gender, marital status or educational background, were selected from different laities. The fact that each church has own laity is connected to the importance of observations. Observations,

which “provide direct access to what people do, as well as what they say they do” (45), together with gatekeepers (in this case priests) facilitated to find participants. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of this study, and assured their agreement by signing the informed consent (App.1). The criteria such as age, gender, professional status or church belonging are not used in this research due to the ethical issues<sup>5</sup>. The interviews were transcribed graphically and translated to English by the researcher. By member checking process, which proved to be decisive, as one participant refused to continue participating in the research, the quotes used in the life history analysis together with interview summaries with each participant were agreed. Hereby, the number of participants was reduced to seven (P1-7).

**In-depth face-to-face interviews** were conducted. According to the *Qualitative Research Guidelines Project*, the “inclusion of open-ended questions and training of interviewers to follow relevant topics...provide the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand... and... allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms” (48). The interview guide, which had been used in this research, is placed in Appendix 2. The first part of the interview guide consisted of open-ended questions on the topic of general notion of religion and what role does it play in participant’s life. This part is aimed to gather the data on the participant’s personal experience of being in religion, e.g. life history analysis. The second part of the interview guide included the questions for measuring Sense of Coherence, modified from a written questionnaire to an oral interview guide by the researcher’s supervisor Maurice Mittelmark. Interviews with the permission of participants were audio recorded. In addition, interview protocol was used in order to

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<sup>5</sup> the quote, where participant reports on the refusal to be a gynaecologist, identifies relation to medicine, what might to some extent indicate the educational background, or professional activity, which are currently different.

make field-notes. Interviews were conducted in Tbilisi (the capital of Georgia) in October 2011. Audio recordings and transcriptions are planned to be destroyed after the thesis is completed.

### ***Data Analysis and Findings***

The first stage of phenomenological reduction, after the bracketing (listening to the recordings of the interviews and reading the transcripts in order to understand what the participant is saying, rather than what the researcher expects to hear) in this research is presented by the delineating the units of relevant meanings (46, 50, 51). By so doing the transcendental statements become immanent for the researcher. This ‘Nonentity’ leads to stay as true to the data as possible with having a sense of whole interview. In phenomenology, this approach is called transcendental phenomenology (49). However, the next stage of this phenomenological reduction is combining the units of relevant meanings by clustering them into categories, what makes this research hermeneutical as well. The categories (clusters) were distinguished as acknowledgement, feeling, predisposition, affiliation, perception. These two stages of the phenomenological reduction of the life history analysis (lived experience) together with the interview summaries and brief descriptions of each participant are presented below<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> the quotes used in life history analysis as well as the interview summaries and brief descriptions were agreed with participants by member checking process

## Participant 1 (P1)

### *Life history analysis*

#### **Interview**

<sup>1</sup>I consider myself as a religious person, and <sup>2</sup>wish I could live this way, I mean to live the “church life” [P’s emphasis], but, <sup>3</sup>sometimes, it’s hard to do (...) To me, <sup>4</sup>the “church life” means not to just strictly follow the Ten Commandments, but also to adhere other external features, <sup>5</sup>for example, attending the Liturgy every Sunday or on Holidays, fasting and many other, which <sup>3</sup>I cannot always manage (...) Usually, <sup>6</sup>I attend the rituals, <sup>7</sup>have good relations with priests, one is my confessor (...) <sup>8</sup>I always try to listen to his advice and blessings. <sup>9</sup>We discuss a lot on the topic of religion, spiritual relationship and so (...) especially our (human) relationship with God. <sup>10</sup>I feel either love or fear and obedience to God (...) <sup>11</sup>I consider God as a meaning of life, as a *raison d’être*. <sup>12</sup>My faith and my confessor’s advices always help me to cope with the difficulties in life (...) in <sup>13</sup>self/life-control, making decisions, <sup>14</sup>relations with others, and <sup>15</sup>perception of world in general. For example, I refused to be a gynaecologist, because in the Soviet period, when religion was banned at all, I couldn’t refuse to perform an abortion <sup>13</sup>due to my religious beliefs.

#### **Units of relevant meanings**

1. P1 is a religious person
2. Motivation to live “church life”
3. Understanding of difficulties of this mode of life
4. Deepens the meaning of “church life”
5. Examples of external features
6. Participating in the church rituals
7. Positive relationship with clergy
8. Listening to advice
9. Discusses religion with the priest
10. Feels either love or fear and obedience to God
11. Considers God as a meaning of life, as a *raison d’être*
12. Help of faith and confessor’s advice
13. Help of faith and advice in self/life-control, making decisions
14. Help of faith and advice in relationship with other people
15. Help of faith and advices in perception of world

<sup>16</sup> I feel no regrets. <sup>17</sup> Nowadays my work and my activities are compatible with my faith (...) that is why <sup>18</sup> I am in peace of mind. I think, <sup>19</sup> there is no happiness without love, I mean Christian love, unlimited charity: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” [P quotes the line from the Gospel]. <sup>20</sup> I go up consciously to the church charter (...) and <sup>21</sup> I really believe that “It is done unto you as you believe” [P quotes the line from the Gospel].	<sup>16.</sup> Does not feel any regrets <sup>17.</sup> Work and activities are compatible with beliefs <sup>18.</sup> Is in peace of mind <sup>19.</sup> States that there is no happiness without religious understanding of love <sup>20.</sup> Goes up to the church charter consciously, quotes the Gospel <sup>21.</sup> Strong system of beliefs, quotes the Gospel
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### Clusters of relevant meanings

I. <i>Acknowledgement</i>	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
II. <i>Feeling</i>	1, 2, 3, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19
III. <i>Predisposition</i>	2, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21
IV. <i>Affiliation</i>	6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 17, 21
V. <i>Perception</i>	10, 11, 15, 17

### Interview summary with a brief description of P1

P1, who is a religious person with a strong system of beliefs, who understands the complexity but is motivated to live Church life, considers God as an authentic meaning of life. This consideration induces the ambivalent feelings of obedience, fear and love, genuine religious understanding of which P1 exposes as happiness and unlimited charity. Consequently, has no regret. Being in peace of mind whose activities are compatible with beliefs, P1 acknowledges assistance of faith and confessor's advices in self/life-control and decision making process. This assistance contributes to abide the Church charter consciously, with further participating in church rituals, discussions and positive relationship with clergy and laity.

## Participant 2 (P2)

### *Life history analysis*

#### **Interview**

<sup>1</sup>Don't know what to answer (...) <sup>2</sup>I'm more a believer, than a follower, I was baptised as an Orthodox Christian. <sup>3</sup>Being Orthodox means being "extremely correct" [P's emphasis] in many aspects of the life and <sup>4</sup>not breaking the rules (...) which, I think, is possible only for saints. <sup>5</sup>However Orthodox Christianity is closer to me than other religions (...) <sup>6</sup>some of them are just not acceptable and anti-human, while <sup>7</sup>ours is more or less tolerant. <sup>8</sup>Sometimes I go to the church (...) it <sup>9</sup>depends on a mood (...) not just because I must, <sup>9</sup>I go if I want (...) the <sup>10</sup>main thing for me is the understanding of the meaning why I go to church and not the activities performed there. <sup>11</sup>I participate in rituals in a small part, less than more (...) <sup>12</sup>I do not completely understand some of them (...) why are they important or necessary. <sup>13</sup>For me church is a place to think about transcendent, spiritual, sacred, take a rest from everyday routine and <sup>14</sup>in less aspect is a place for the public rituals. <sup>15</sup>With the priests, it is hard to say, hmm, my attitude depends on the personality of the priest and <sup>16</sup>the fact that he is the priest, doesn't play any role (...) <sup>17</sup>I have very good

#### **Units of relevant meanings**

1. For P2 is difficult to answer
2. P2 is more believer than follower
3. Places emphasis on the strictness of Orthodoxy
4. Describes it as not breaking the rules
5. Feels that this ideology is more closer
6. While others are not acceptable and anti-human
7. Orthodoxy is more or less loyal
8. Sometimes goes to the church
9. Church visits depend on a mood
10. Importance of understanding the meaning of church visits and not the rituals
11. Participates in the rituals in a small part
12. Does not completely understand the rituals
13. Church is a place to think about transcendent, spiritual, sacred, and a place to rest
14. Not for the public rituals
15. An attitude and relationship with the priests depends on the personality of lasts
16. Does not depends on the position
17. Is positive with the educated, loyal

relations and attitude with the educated, loyal, intelligent priests, and <sup>18</sup>try not to get in touch with fanatic and strict priests. <sup>19</sup>I don't feel any love or fear of God (...) <sup>20</sup>I feel God as a part of us (...) if <sup>21</sup>we love someone/thing - we do love God, if <sup>22</sup>we love ourselves – we do love God. <sup>23</sup>I take part in religious discussions, for example now we are discussing religion (...) but <sup>24</sup>I don't like to discuss this topic with people who think that their religion is the only correct one and all others are wrong (...) <sup>25</sup>no, never, there is no room for the discussions, soon <sup>26</sup>it leads to dispute, fight (P's means quarrel) (...) especially <sup>27</sup>it's "dangerous" [P's emphasis] to be in touch with people with strict ideas (...) as soon as someone tells me "Allah is the only god and Mohammad is his prophet, all other things are Shaitanic", I stop all discussions with him/her (...) the same is with fanatic Christians which I have met many times. <sup>28</sup>I had some challenges and difficulties in life and my <sup>29</sup>faith helped me (...) <sup>30</sup>I have never discussed my problems with any priest (...) <sup>31</sup>don't have so close relationship to <sup>32</sup>open my heart for him. <sup>33</sup>Orthodox philosophy is quite useful to fit the society, not to break law, <sup>34</sup>to have good relationship with people and <sup>35</sup>control your own behaviour (...) I think it would be much better if <sup>36</sup>90% of

an intelligent priests

18. Tries not to get in touch with fanatic and strict ones
19. Does not feel any love or fear
20. Considers God as a part of humans
21. External explaining of this consideration by being in love with someone/thing
22. Internal explaining of this consideration by being in love with ourselves
23. Participating in religious discussions
24. Avoids discussing this topic with one-track mind people
25. Strong negative emotion
26. Explains it by disputes and quarrels
27. Feels unsafe with the one-track mind people
28. Had experienced the difficulties and the challenges in life
29. Faith helped
30. Never discussed own problems with the priest
31. Lack of relationship with clergy
32. Distrust
33. Finds Orthodox philosophy useful to manage society
34. Good (productive) relationship with people
35. Self-control
36. General reasoning

people who usually go to church, could understand, why they are there, what do they do, what is Christianity and why <sup>37</sup>it is better to use this philosophy in life (...) otherwise <sup>38</sup>they look like wolves in the sheep's skin - taking part in church rituals and, after they leave church, doing radically different thing. <sup>39</sup>Partially it helps me, <sup>40</sup>I will not make decisions, which hardly violate the rules, I mean ideology, <sup>41</sup>but not all of them are followed by me. <sup>42</sup>My current activity does not correspond to all recommendations of Orthodox Christianity (...) <sup>43</sup>I'm lazy and not strong psychologically, <sup>44</sup>have some fears and phobias, for example, claustrophobia, <sup>45</sup>I have to be stronger and take more responsibility, make <sup>46</sup>more "aggressive" [P's emphasis] decisions in life. <sup>47</sup>However the most important for me is health of my family, friends and all close people, financial welfare of the same people, good situation in my country (...) and <sup>48</sup>all that things which help me to achieve intellectual satisfaction.

- <sup>37</sup>. Suggestion about using this philosophy
- <sup>38</sup>. Assertion comparing with the wolves in the sheep skin
- <sup>39</sup>. Self-using of this philosophy
- <sup>40</sup>. Does not make decisions which hardly violate the ideological rules
- <sup>41</sup>. However does not follow all the rules
- <sup>42</sup>. Recognizes that current activity does not respond to all recommendations of Orthodox Christianity
- <sup>43</sup>. Personal assessment of inertia and psychological weakness
- <sup>44</sup>. Has some fears and phobias
- <sup>45</sup>. Has to be stronger and take more responsibility
- <sup>46</sup>. Has to make more "aggressive" decisions
- <sup>47</sup>. Importance of health (physical, social) and financial status
- <sup>48</sup>. Importance of things which help to achieve intellectual satisfaction

## Clusters of relevant meanings

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| I. <i>Acknowledgement</i> | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 29, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48 |
| II. <i>Feeling</i>        | 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 13, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29,  |



	32, 35, 38, 42, 43, 44
III. <i>Predisposition</i>	4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 27, 29, 31, 32, 35, 38, 39, 40, 45 41, 43, 45, 46, 48
IV. <i>Affiliation</i>	11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 37, 47
V. <i>Perception</i>	3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 23, 33, 34, 36, 37

### **Interview summary with a brief description of P2**

Correlating religious ideologies, P2 considers Orthodoxy as “closer” despite of its outlined strictness. Being more believer than follower, for P2 church is a place to rest with ability to think about transcendence and sacredness rather than a place for the public rituals, which are not completely understood by P2. Such introversion together with the absence of the confessor, rare involvement in rituals, avoiding religious discussions and the persons with the strict ideas on the one hand, and awareness of God as a part of human beings on the other, allows to think about high level of spirituality in this case. Nevertheless, recognizing the social aspect of religion and applying its general principles in making decisions, P2 is afflicted with anxiety and phobias. Health, well-being and welfare are highlighted as an intellectual satisfaction contributing factors.

### **Participant 3 (P3)**

#### ***Life history analysis***

##### **Interview**

<sup>1</sup>In general, I am a religious person. <sup>2</sup>I’m not a fanatic (...) <sup>3</sup>don’t follow all the rules and prescriptions, however, <sup>4</sup>I believe in God, but <sup>5</sup>I’m not scared of Second Coming or Wrath of God. <sup>6</sup>I do

##### **Units of relevant meanings**

1. P3 states that is a religious person
2. Is not a fanatic
3. Does not follow all the rules and prescriptions
4. P3 believes in God
5. Is not scared of Second Coming or Wrath of God
6. Does not participate in the rituals

not participate in rituals (...) <sup>7</sup>previously I did, but now I don't, however <sup>8</sup>I find them very interesting and useful for keeping our "inner balance" [P's emphasis] (...) <sup>9</sup>I have a very friendly relations with my confessor, with the rest of clergy also, <sup>10</sup>try not to judge them and not only them, but people at all. Do I participate in discussions about religion? Hmm... Well, <sup>11</sup>I try to avoid them, may be just with my confessor, or with the laity of the church I use to go (...) <sup>12</sup>we live in multicultural society, <sup>13</sup>everyone has his/her own opinion, own religion, it's very personal that is why it's hard to discuss. <sup>14</sup>I feel a strong, huge sense of friendship to God, which is <sup>15</sup>love by itself and <sup>16</sup>Love [P's emphasis] is the highest sense! It is strange, <sup>17</sup>I had serious problems in my private life because of Love, <sup>18</sup>I was close to suicide, but <sup>19</sup>Love saved me (...) you can call it <sup>20</sup>fear of God or whatever, but for me it is Love (...) this <sup>21</sup>Love protected me and I didn't commit this <sup>22</sup>stupid act. For that period of my life <sup>23</sup>I found a lot of answers for the questions <sup>24</sup>I had. <sup>25</sup>These answers were so simple, so clear and genial, that <sup>26</sup>I started to live my life anew and thus much easier (...) <sup>27</sup>I've become more staid, <sup>28</sup>started to take the things as they are, <sup>29</sup>have become more calm and peaceful inside. Nowadays <sup>30</sup>my work is

7. Previously participated
8. Finds the rituals very interesting and useful for keeping "inner balance"
9. P3 has very friendly relations with own confessor and with the rest of clergy
10. Tries not to judge
11. Avoids the discussions about religion
12. Lives in multicultural society, where
13. Everyone has his/her opinion and religion that is why it is hard to discuss this topic
14. P3 feels a strong, huge sense of friendship to God
15. Friendship is love
16. Emphasizes love as a highest sense
17. Had serious problems in private life because of love
18. P3 was close to suicide
19. States that love saved
20. Argues about fear of God
21. Love as a protecting power
22. Considers suicide as a stupid act
23. P3 has found a lot of answers for the questions
24. P3 had a lot of questions
25. The answers were simple, clear and genial
26. P3 started to live a new easy life
27. Has become more staid
28. Started to take the things as they are
29. Has become more calm and peaceful inside
30. P3's work is compatible with religion

compatible with religion, my chief is religious. She lets us do everything in this sense. (...) <sup>31</sup>As I've told you, the most important thing in life is Love in all its forms. <sup>32</sup>Everything is based and is built up on Love. <sup>33</sup>This is the greatest happiness that human can have! "Love your neighbour as yourself!" [P quotes the line from the Gospel]. However, <sup>34</sup>nowadays, due to these informational bum and progress everywhere, <sup>35</sup>lots of things are changed (...) <sup>36</sup>first and foremost our needs. <sup>37</sup>That is why it is hard to follow the Ten Commandments and/or the Nine Beatitudes in their pure and profound religious understanding. <sup>38</sup>It is hard to close your eyes, ears, mouse etc, in order to create an information vacuum around you. <sup>39</sup>Everything depends on circumstances; even <sup>40</sup>sin by itself rests in the circumstances; that means that <sup>41</sup>it is always possible to understand and to forgive everything (...) because <sup>42</sup>each of us – human beings – experiences this greatest sense. <sup>43</sup>This greatest sense was about to kill me, but another Love gave me a new life.

31. Love in all its forms is the most important thing
32. States that everything is based and is built up on love
33. Love is the greatest happiness that human can have
34. Argues for information bum and progress
35. Things are changed because of these processes
36. Emphasizes the changing of human needs
37. This changing is the reason of difficulties in following the Ten Commandments and/or Nine Beatitudes
38. Hard to create an information vacuum
39. P3 says that everything depends on circumstances
40. Considers the sin in circumstances
41. Possibility of understanding and forgiving
42. Everyone experience love
43. Love was about to kill, but gave to P3 a new life

### Clusters of relevant meanings

#### I. *Acknowledgement*

1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43

II. <i>Feeling</i>	1, 2, 4, 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33, 42, 43
III. <i>Predisposition</i>	2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 33, 36, 37, 38, 41, 43
IV. <i>Affiliation</i>	6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 30, 38, 41
V. <i>Perception</i>	12, 13, 21, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38

### **Interview summary with a brief description of P3**

Personal assessment of P3 as a religious person “in general” is based on faith in God without abiding Church prescriptions in detail, participating in the rituals, which P3 considers as an interesting possibility for being in peace of mind. Amicably adjusted towards the clergy and own confessor, P3 avoids the possibility of judging them, which is spread on the civil society as well. Such an avoiding appears in participating in religious discussions as P3 lives in multicultural society. The relationship to God identified by P3 as a strong constant feeling of love played initial protective and coping role during the harmful consequences in private life experienced by P3. For P3, who was intended to commit suicide, own system of beliefs played vital role in understanding and perceiving the meaning of life by providing simple and clear answers, i.e. provided with meaningful and comprehensible skills with further manageability that is obvious in P3’s perception of the events of everyday life.

### **Participant 4 (P4)**

#### *Life history analysis*

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Units of relevant meanings</b>
<sup>1</sup> I consider myself as a religious person, however I don’t, and to be more specific,	<sup>1.</sup> P4 is a religious person
<sup>2</sup> I can’t live the church life. <sup>3</sup> I am Orthodox and have fear of God (...) <sup>4</sup> I	<sup>2.</sup> However, cannot live the church life <sup>3.</sup> Is Orthodox and has fear of God <sup>4.</sup> P4 believes in God

believe in God, but <sup>5</sup>I don't go to the church every Sunday, don't attend the Liturgy or morning/evening prayers (...)

I can't get any of these. <sup>6</sup>I know I always can find a reason for this, <sup>7</sup>but I also know that it should not be like this.

Sometimes, I just, simply, forget it (...) often on the Holidays (...) and <sup>8</sup>when I ask myself why, the answer is only laziness. <sup>9</sup>I can't find any other reason; <sup>10</sup>even my work gives me a hand that I would have gone, but I don't. However, in the same time, <sup>11</sup>I am seriously stressed and, sometimes, <sup>12</sup>depressed because of my laziness (...) but <sup>13</sup>I can cope with it, <sup>14</sup>just have to get a grip on myself.

<sup>15</sup>When I get it, I'm involved in the rituals very actively and <sup>16</sup>experience inexplicable feeling of lightness, <sup>17</sup>the flight of the soul, and <sup>18</sup>I'm in peace of mind. (...) <sup>19</sup>I feel more love and fear to God, <sup>20</sup>yes, fear, than other feelings. <sup>21</sup>My fear is based on my laziness, <sup>22</sup>because of my laziness I don't adhere the church life and <sup>23</sup>feel ashamed (...) <sup>24</sup>I'm very critical to myself. <sup>25</sup>I'm not well versed in matters of dogma <sup>26</sup>to participate in different religious discussions (...) may be <sup>27</sup>just with the people closest to me.

<sup>28</sup>All that I have is my faith, <sup>29</sup>which gives me a hand to live my life, <sup>30</sup>to cope with the difficulties in life (...) <sup>31</sup>Once, I tried to emigrate, and I was stopped and

5. Does not go to the church and attend the rituals
6. Knows that always has a reason
7. Also knows that should not be like this, sometimes simply forgets
8. Does not go because of laziness
9. Cannot find any other reason
10. Work gives a hand to go
11. Is seriously stressed because of laziness
12. Is depressed because of laziness
13. However can cope with it
14. Just has to grip on his/herself
15. After this is involved in rituals very actively
16. Experiences inexplicable feeling of lightness
17. Experiences the flight of the soul
18. Is in peace of mind
19. Feels more love and fear to God
20. Confirms that feels more fear than other feelings
21. P4's fear is based on laziness
22. Repeats that because of laziness does not adhere the church life
23. Feels ashamed
24. P4 is very critical to his/herself
25. P4 is not well versed in matters of dogma
26. Because of it does not participate in discussions
27. Discusses just with the closest people
28. Faith is all that P4 has
29. Faith relieves P4's life
30. Faith relieves coping with the difficulties in P4's life
31. P4 brings example of 28-30

was arrested at the boarder. All that I had with me was the icon, in front of which I prayed day and night. On the Feast of the Ascension, they let me go (...) <sup>32</sup>I pray often; it can be said every day. <sup>33</sup>The prayers let me stay in peace of mind and <sup>34</sup>give me hope for the future. <sup>35</sup>I find some answers for the questions I have, but <sup>36</sup>I'm not looking for the proofs, <sup>37</sup>I don't need them. <sup>38</sup>It's all in God's hands. <sup>39</sup>Awareness of this helps me to live easier, <sup>40</sup>to avoid conflicts, <sup>41</sup>to accept people around me as they are (...) <sup>42</sup>when someone gives me a slip I try to turn for the other just not to aggravate the situation. <sup>43</sup>This also applies to my internal conflicts, <sup>44</sup>on which some of my decisions are based (for example, my second marriage, my communicating with my child who is no longer a child, and so on). <sup>45</sup>When I think about what makes me happy in life my response is faith. <sup>46</sup>All other things come out from faith. I believe, <sup>47</sup>the Lord won't give us the difficulties that we would not have coped with (...) <sup>48</sup>for me is just enough that the Lord gives me. <sup>49</sup>I am grateful.

- 32. P4 prays very often, almost every day
- 33. The prayers let P4 stay in peace of mind
- 34. The prayers give P4 hope for the future
- 35. P4 finds some answers in the prayers
- 36. P4 is not looking for the proofs
- 37. P4 does not need the proofs
- 38. Everything is in God's hands
- 39. Awareness of this helps P4 to live easier
- 40. Helps to avoid the conflicts
- 41. Helps to accept people around P4 as they are
- 42. Considers "slipping" as a method not to aggravate the situation
- 43. "Everything in God's hands" and "slipping" as a methods to resolve the inner conflicts
- 44. P4's decisions are based on inner conflicts
- 45. Faith makes P4 happy in life
- 46. Other things proceed from faith
- 47. States that the Lord won't give people the difficulties that they would not have coped with
- 48. Lord's gifts are enough for P4
- 49. P4 is grateful

## Clusters of relevant meanings

### I. *Acknowledgement*

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48

II. <i>Feeling</i>	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 29, 33, 34, 36, 38, 39, 43, 45, 49
III. <i>Predisposition</i>	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 45, 48
IV. <i>Affiliation</i>	10, 15, 26, 27, 40, 41, 42, 43, 47
V. <i>Perception</i>	25, 29, 30, 35, 36, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47

### **Interview summary with a brief description of P4**

Due to the personal assessment of being indolent, but at the same time, awareness of own mistakes and abilities, P4 experiences stress and depression. The perceived lack of possibility attending the listed rituals is replenished by successful coping, what places P4 at the centre of positive and empowering feelings. The range of experienced feelings towards God consists of love and fear, where the last one is distinctly emphasized by the self-critic approach of P4. Being not well versed in matters of dogma, P4 argues for authentic faith as for unique coping strategy, by using a prayer as a coping tool with everyday-life difficulties. Faith experience provides the person with the harmonious feelings with the world and people in it that is reflected on the decision making process as well, what leads to happiness, which P4 is grateful.

### **Participant 5 (P5)**

#### ***Life history analysis***

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Units of relevant meanings</b>
Well, yes, <sup>1</sup> I think I'm religious (...) at least <sup>2</sup> I try to be a normal lay. <sup>3</sup> I go to the church whenever possible, when I have time. <sup>4</sup> I like the rituals and activities there, <sup>5</sup> to the priests am well, <sup>6</sup> don't judge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><sup>1.</sup> P5 thinks that is religious</li> <li><sup>2.</sup> Tries to be a normal lay</li> <li><sup>3.</sup> Goes to the church whenever is possible</li> <li><sup>4.</sup> Likes the rituals and activities there</li> <li><sup>5.</sup> Is well to the priests</li> <li><sup>6.</sup> P5 does not judge the priests</li> </ol>

them, but not because of “Judge not, that ye be not judged” [P quotes the line from the Gospel]. No. Just for the reason that, simply, <sup>7</sup>we’re all human beings. (...) <sup>8</sup>I feel appreciation, respect and gratitude to the Lord. <sup>9</sup>I’m always in discussions around the fundamental questions of dogma. I often have to discuss these questions with the followers of other religion as well. (...) <sup>10</sup>Faith helps me in upbringing of my nephew, who is autistic, and <sup>11</sup>requires infinite attention and patience. <sup>12</sup>By so doing, you become attentive to everything. (...) <sup>13</sup>I can’t say that faith and Christian way of life have taken root in me over past couple of years. <sup>14</sup>I’ve got it from my childhood with upbringing and education; <sup>15</sup>I mean compassion, help and love for others, gratitude and other benefactors. <sup>16</sup>Growing up I realised that I already live in the religion, i.e. <sup>17</sup>I already have the starting points to recognize and to accept a situation, people and facts; <sup>18</sup>I already have an outlook on life. <sup>19</sup>That is why for me it is hard to divide; <sup>20</sup>I can’t say that my adoption of any decision in life is based on religion. <sup>16</sup>I have this base from childhood. <sup>21</sup>So, my understanding of things is not different from the religious perception. That is why <sup>22</sup>I feel my self a kind of comfortable. <sup>23</sup>Last five years I have been deepening the knowledge of

7. Does not judge due to “we are all human beings”
8. P5 feels appreciation, respect and gratitude to the Lord
9. Is always in discussions around the fundamental questions of dogma
10. Faith helps P5 in nephew upbringing
11. Nephew requires infinite attention and patience
12. Because of nephew requirements P5 becomes attentive to everything
13. Faith and Christian way of life have not taken root in P5 over past couple of years
14. P5 got them from childhood with upbringing and education
15. By faith and Christian way of life P5 means compassion, help and love for others, gratitude and other benefactors
16. Growing up P5 realised that lives in the religion
17. P5 already had the starting points to accept the situation, the people and the facts
18. P5 already had the outlook on life
19. Because of the outlook it is hard to divide
20. Adoption of any decision in P5’s life is not based on religion
21. P5’s understanding of things is not different from the religious
22. P5 feels comfortable
23. Has deepened the knowledge of religion



religion. (...) <sup>24</sup>Faith fills me, <sup>25</sup>I go to another level, <sup>26</sup>analyze a lot. Here I can clearly say about <sup>27</sup>the role of religion in terms of knowledge. (...) <sup>28</sup>To be honest, I can't understand how the human activities can depend on religion. <sup>29</sup>They depend on our conscience, on which <sup>30</sup>is based our faith, <sup>31</sup>our system of beliefs. As it is known, "It is done unto you as you believe" [P quotes the line from the Gospel] Thus, <sup>32</sup>everything is done unto us due to our conscience (...) <sup>33</sup>Most of all I hate to cram myself into a situation. <sup>34</sup>I always take things as they are, not as I want to see them. <sup>35</sup>The most important thing for me is well-being of my family, physical, mental and spiritual health.

- 24. Faith fills P5
- 25. P5 goes to another level
- 26. P5 analyzes a lot
- 27. P5 puts emphasize on the role of religion in terms of knowledge
- 28. For P5 is difficult to understand how the human activities can depend on religion
- 29. Says that human activities depend on human conscience
- 30. Faith is based on human conscience
- 31. System of beliefs is based on human conscience
- 32. P5 states that everything people get is due to their conscience
- 33. P5 hates to cram into the situation
- 34. Always takes things as they are not as P5 wants to see them
- 35. Well-being of family and physical, mental and spiritual health are of the primary importance for P5

### Clusters of relevant meanings

I. <i>Acknowledgement</i>	1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34
II. <i>Feeling</i>	1, 4, 8, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 28, 33
III. <i>Predisposition</i>	2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35
IV. <i>Affiliation</i>	5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35
V. <i>Perception</i>	7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35

## Interview summary with a brief description of P5

Being familiar with the ideological basics from childhood and having a strong sense of reasonableness, P5 continuously deepens own knowledge about religion. Such an attitude and behaviour provide P5 by comprehensible understanding of Christian way of life as a compassion and altruism, which induce the feelings of appreciation, respect and gratitude to God. Consequently, this positive experience is reflected in continuous sharing by active participating in religious discussions and upbringing of posterity. On the other hand, by personal assessment the person outlines the role of own education, as the roots of this perception of religion was laid in P5's childhood, awareness of what makes it difficult to identify a direct role of religion in shaping the world view. Therefore, P5, perceiving the events adequately and comparing faith with a conscience, on which human behavior is directly dependent, experiences a number of positive feelings, which the person defines as comfortable.

## Participant 6 (P6)

### *Life history analysis*

#### Interview

<sup>1</sup>Every one of us is to some extent religious and <sup>2</sup>sticks some norms and rules. <sup>3</sup>Sometimes these rules coincide with the religious ideology, but sometimes they don't. <sup>4</sup>It's like a difference between ethics and law. <sup>5</sup>I can't say that I strictly adhere the religious way of life. <sup>6</sup>Nowadays, it is simply impossible (...) <sup>7</sup>I can't do it also in virtue of my private and specific desires. <sup>8</sup>At first glance it may seem shocking (...) I'm referring to homosexuality, however, <sup>9</sup>all of us are sinners (...) <sup>10</sup>I do not kill, do not steal

#### Units of relevant meanings

1. Everyone is to some extent religious by P6
2. Everyone adheres some norms and rules
3. P6 states that this rules sometimes can correspond to the religious ideology
4. Parallels it with the difference between ethics and law
5. P6 does not adhere the religious way of life strictly
6. Says that currently it is impossible
7. It is impossible in virtue of P6's private and specific desires
8. Considers homosexuality as shocking
9. People are sinners
10. P6 compares homosexuality with killing and thieving

etc (...) <sup>11</sup>I have a constant internal search. <sup>12</sup>I haven't met a person without questions yet ☺ (...) <sup>13</sup>I try often to attend the divine service. <sup>14</sup>It gives me hope and <sup>15</sup>helps to live on. <sup>16</sup>I learn a lot in dealing with people and clergy after the service, let's say, <sup>17</sup>I do my "qualitative research" [P's emphasis] as you do, but <sup>18</sup>I explore the world. (...) <sup>19</sup>I can't say that it passes me by. <sup>20</sup>Even if I do not participate directly, <sup>21</sup>I still am a part of it. <sup>22</sup>It pleases. (...) <sup>23</sup>I don't think that my search is over. <sup>24</sup>I had problems without this search, <sup>25</sup>a kind of "existential crisis" [P's emphasis] (...) yeah, <sup>26</sup>I struggled a lot (...) <sup>27</sup>without any meaning in life, <sup>28</sup>without any reason to live (...) <sup>29</sup>but I coped with this crisis (...) <sup>30</sup>a kind of reborn or revive (...) and <sup>31</sup>each time I feel that I go deeper in life and <sup>32</sup>become stronger. That is why the <sup>33</sup>most important task for me for today is to keep this feeling of balance inside, to <sup>34</sup>feed my mind and soul, and to <sup>35</sup>understand what I want from life and from society, <sup>36</sup>especially from the society, <sup>37</sup>but not what they want from me. <sup>38</sup>This kind of an attitude makes my life easier in our <sup>39</sup>homophobic society (...) and, strangely enough, but <sup>40</sup>I came to this understanding through the religion, which <sup>41</sup>primarily teaches love, <sup>42</sup>love without self-interest, <sup>43</sup>pure dedication.

11. P6 has a constant internal search
12. States, that has not met a person without the questions
13. P6 tries to attend the rituals often
14. The rituals give hope
15. The rituals help to live on
16. P6 learns a lot in dealing with people and clergy
17. Does own research
18. Explores the world
19. The rituals do not pass P6 by
20. P6 does not participate in the rituals directly
21. Considers own self as a part of it
22. This consideration pleases
23. P6's search is not over
24. P6 had problems without the search
25. P6 had "existential crisis" without the search
26. P6 struggled a lot
27. Struggled without any meaning in life
28. Struggled without any reason to live
29. P6 coped with this crisis
30. Coping as a kind of reborn or revive
31. P6 feels that each time goes deeper in life
32. P6 feels that each time becomes stronger
33. Currently, the most important task for P6 is keeping the balance inside
34. Currently, the most important task for P6 is mind and soul feeding
35. Currently, to understand what P6 wants from the life and from the society is of primary importance
36. P6 puts emphasis on the society
37. Understanding what P6 wants from the life and from the society, but not what they want from P6
38. This kind an attitude makes P6's life easier in the society
39. P6 defines the society as homophobic
40. P6 came to this understanding through religion
41. Religion primarily teaches love

(...) <sup>44</sup>There is nothing above love and <sup>45</sup>the Lord is love, and <sup>46</sup>when you realize it you're in the state of harmony with the world, because <sup>47</sup>“the world is your cradle and the grave is the world” [P quotes a line from a poem by M. Tsvetaeva]. (...) <sup>48</sup>The main precept of Christianity is based on the state of mind and soul, which is love. That is, <sup>49</sup>I can say that religion gives me right that, what I lack daily: Hope, Faith and Love.

- <sup>42.</sup> This love is without self-interest
- <sup>43.</sup> This love is pure dedication
- <sup>44.</sup> P6 says that there is nothing above love
- <sup>45.</sup> P6 states that the Lord is love
- <sup>46.</sup> Realizing this leads to the state of harmony with the world by P6
- <sup>47.</sup> Poetic comparison of the world as the cradle and the grave
- <sup>48.</sup> Love as a state of mind and soul is the main precept of Christianity
- <sup>49.</sup> Religion supplies P6 with hope, faith and love

### Clusters of relevant meanings

I. <i>Acknowledgement</i>	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49
II. <i>Feeling</i>	5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26, 30, 31, 32, 34, 38, 40, 41, 44, 45, 49
III. <i>Predisposition</i>	2, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49
IV. <i>Affiliation</i>	9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 35, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 45, 46, 49
V. <i>Perception</i>	3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49

### Interview summary with a brief description of P6

Being in a state of a constant internal search and had experienced existential crisis, P6 applies religion as a strategy to cope with personal conflicts and social judgments. High level of introversion of the person, whose sexual orientation is homosexual and remains undeclared in homophobic society, is presented by continuous retrieval of

eternal truths. Explaining this kind of state as retrieval, P6 accentuates the balanced feelings and comprehensible understanding that are provided by religious beliefs. On the other hand, religious beliefs induce an extraverted behaviour, as the person is motivated to attend the divine service with further communication, where P6 is provided by needed positive and empowering range of feeling.

## Participant 7 (P7)

### *Life history analysis*

#### **Interview**

<sup>1</sup>In my understanding, I'm religious. (...) I mean, <sup>2</sup>I adhere to the possible extent the directions, rituals, dogma and rules or commandments, which are prescribed by my religion, I mean Orthodoxy; (...) and how it is, it's another question, but I try my best. <sup>3</sup>Mostly, self-love and self-pity, but I work on them. (...) <sup>4</sup>This kind of attitude helped me in making a decision to get married. <sup>5</sup>Now I have three angels. Knowing myself, <sup>6</sup>if I was not religious, I would have never got married, no one would get along with me, and <sup>7</sup>I would have continued to commit sins. (...) My attitude to sin, well, <sup>8</sup>there are some sins that I don't mean I can't, no, I don't want to eliminate. <sup>9</sup>Although, there are some that I don't notice. (...) <sup>10</sup>I can say that I live with church life, <sup>11</sup>at least superficially. <sup>12</sup>Inside I'm trying to, but the factor of laziness is also present. When I come home tired after work, <sup>13</sup>I can stand another 10 minutes to pray, but

#### **Units of relevant meanings**

1. P7 is religious
2. P7 adheres the directions, rituals, dogma and rules or commandments, which are prescribed by Orthodoxy
3. Conceders self-love and self-pity as the concepts P7 has to work on
4. This kind of attitude helped P7 in making a decision to get married
5. P7 lives with family and have three children
6. Says that if was not religious, P7 would have never got married
7. If P7 was not religious, would continue to commit sins
8. Thinks, there are some sins that P7 does not want to eliminate.
9. Some of the sins P7 does not notice
10. P7 lives in church life
11. Thinks that lives superficially
12. Inside P7 tries, but is lazy
13. Refers to not praying because of laziness

I don't do it just because of laziness. (...)

<sup>14</sup>This ideology is much understandable and clear for me; I mean dogma and the rituals. <sup>15</sup>It is a way to be closer to God, to see oneself in his light, <sup>16</sup>a way of heart catharsis. (...) <sup>17</sup>I experience totally different feeling when I pray at church during the service, (...) <sup>18</sup>this feeling is much loftier, <sup>19</sup>and a sense of grace is much stronger, than when I pray at home. (...) <sup>20</sup>I often confess and <sup>21</sup>it helps me, however, <sup>22</sup>I understand that it is foolish and shameful to repeat the same sin list at the confession, (...) <sup>23</sup>that means that I either don't want to or I don't make any effort to fix it. As our Saint Fathers said, <sup>24</sup>the more often we confess the better (...) I don't mean every day, no, it's ridiculous. <sup>25</sup>The frequent confession is a good reminder about our weakness. No one is perfect, but <sup>26</sup>it is possible to correct and improve something inside. <sup>27</sup>Every Christian should confess and receive Communion. <sup>28</sup>This is the way to Perfection [P's emphasis] as our religion prescribes. (...) At this stage of my spiritual growth, <sup>29</sup>this Perfection is nothing but a wish to be cleansed, to be purified. <sup>30</sup>This is essential; I mean the wish, <sup>31</sup>and the rest is in God's hands. The wish is important due to the fact that <sup>32</sup>in our religion we are free to will and to choose, as opposed to or in comparison

14. This ideology is much understandable and clear for P7
15. P7 considers this ideology as the way to be closer to God
16. P7 considers this ideology as the way of heart catharsis
17. P7 experiences totally different feeling praying at church during the service
18. This feeling is much loftier
19. The sense of grace at the church service is much stronger, than when P7 prays at home
20. P7 confesses often
21. Confessions help
22. P7 regards repeating of the same sin list at the confession as foolish and ashamed
23. Considers it as an absence of will
24. States that frequent confession is better
25. Frequent confession is a good reminder of sins
26. P7 passes in review the possibility to correct and improve something inside
27. States that every Christian should confess and receive Communion
28. Considers confession and receiving Communion as the way to perfection
29. Perfection is nothing but the wish to be cleansed, to be purified by P7
30. Emphasizes the importance of the wish
31. The rest is in God's hands
32. P7 says that people are free to will and to choose in Orthodoxy

with other religions. For the matter of that, <sup>33</sup>everything depends on us. On the other hand, <sup>34</sup>life of sin is limited life, i.e. <sup>35</sup>you confine your original freedom in terms of Perfection (...) i.e. <sup>36</sup>adhering religion, you will cognize and continue to cognize God unboundedly, <sup>37</sup>who is perfect and is the source. <sup>38</sup>On the basis of this, there is a constant discovery of the divine as in you or you in supernatural or celestial as well. (...) <sup>39</sup>I can't say that I am in search of sacred. <sup>40</sup>I've found and get to know it. (...) <sup>41</sup>About the clergy, I choose the authorities not by their words, but by their deeds, i.e. whether they live their lives as they teach us to live. (...) <sup>42</sup>The nature of my relationship to God, I would say, is bold. <sup>43</sup>I realize all my acts and deeds, but continue to behave like this, <sup>44</sup>and still continue to enjoy this love. <sup>45</sup>The Lord is number one, to whom I turn in the first and the last minute, <sup>46</sup>in joy and sorrow. (...) <sup>47</sup>I participate in discussions about religion very often (...) from the evidence of the existence of God to the dogma. <sup>48</sup>It is easy for me to defend my point of view because of the knowledge and faith, <sup>49</sup>faith as a conscious belief. I mean, at the beginning was the belief, now it is embodied with the knowledge. <sup>50</sup>Due to this kind of faith I get to know the world much deeper; its'

- 33. That is why the wish is important
- 34. P7 considers life of sin as limited life
- 35. Life in sin confines original freedom in terms of perfection
- 36. States that adhering religion leads to cognize with following cognizing God
- 37. God is perfect and is the source
- 38. There is a constant discovery of the divine as in human as well human in supernatural or celestial
- 39. P7 is not in search of the sacred
- 40. P7 has found the sacred, and gets to know it
- 41. P7 is very selective in clergy, chooses the authorities by their deeds
- 42. Considers own relationship to God as bold
- 43. Realizes own acts and deeds
- 44. P7 says that still enjoys God's love
- 45. The Lord is number one in the first and the last minute
- 46. The Lord is number one in joy and sorrow
- 47. P7 is often involved in religious discussions
- 48. For P7 is easy to defend own point of view because of the knowledge and faith
- 49. Faith as a conscious belief
- 50. P7 gets to know the world much deeper due to this kind of faith

structure, relationship, statehood, nationhood, patriotism etc. (...)

<sup>51</sup>Awareness of the fact that God is everywhere helps a lot. It is like when you wear the uniform, which prevents you from many deeds. <sup>52</sup>With this kind of control you are not inhibited, moreover, by <sup>53</sup>overcoming you feel your inner growth (...) satisfaction. (...) <sup>54</sup>It is a kind of will training. (...) <sup>55</sup>Currently, my activities are proceeded from the beliefs. <sup>56</sup>As a result, I am in peace of mind. <sup>57</sup>If it were not for faith, I would have gone crazy because of such a profusion of stress. (...) "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." [P quotes the line from the Psalm 91]. <sup>58</sup>When me, my family and close to me people are under the cover of God, then I do not fear.

- <sup>51.</sup> Awareness of the fact that God is everywhere helps P7 a lot
- <sup>52.</sup> P7 considers it as a not inhibited control
- <sup>53.</sup> Overcoming as inner growth and satisfaction
- <sup>54.</sup> P7 considers this control as a will-training
- <sup>55.</sup> P7's current activities are proceeded from the beliefs
- <sup>56.</sup> P7 is in peace of mind
- <sup>57.</sup> If it were not for faith, P7 would has gone crazy because of such a profusion of stress
- <sup>58.</sup> P7 does not feel any fear being under the cover of God

### Clusters of relevant meanings

- I. *Acknowledgement* 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58
- II. *Feeling* 1, 3, 6, 7, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 39, 40, 42, 44, 46, 51, 53, 54, 56, 58
- III. *Predisposition* 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 45, 46, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58



IV. <i>Affiliation</i>	5, 6, 10, 20, 24, 41, 47, 48, 50, 52, 55, 58
V. <i>Perception</i>	10, 14, 15, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 45, 45, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 58

#### **Interview summary with a brief description of P7**

By the personal assessment P7 identifies own self as religious, with the clear understanding of ideological principles, influence of which is reflected on self-control, self-critics and decision making. P7, who experiences strong positive range of feelings during the praying in church, and, consequently, participates in rituals and confesses regularly, considers the life of sin as a limited in terms of freedom. Perceiving God as a source of Perfection, P7 feels no needs for continuing the search. This type of attitude is expressed in relation to the clergy, to whom P7 is critical. Being well educated in the matters of dogma, and having strong system of beliefs, P7 experience strong existential dependence to faith, which appears in the interview. On the other hand, this kind of dependence as a motivational factor is of main importance as a stimulating factor for further development.

After the clusters of relevant meanings were delineated, the logical operations, like comparing, distinguishing, subsuming under the concept, predicating etc, i.e. horizontalization of the data may be done (50, 51).

*Table 2. Horizontalization of the data*

CONSTITUENTS	CLUSTERS OF RELEVANT MEANINGS	
<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Acknowledgement</b>	
<i>knowledge-intelligence</i>	<b>P1</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
	<b>P2</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 29, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48
	<b>P3</b>	1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43
	<b>P4</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48
	<b>P5</b>	1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34

	<b>P6</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49
	<b>P7</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58
<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Feeling</b>	
<i>ego identity</i>	<b>P1</b>	1, 2, 3, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19
	<b>P2</b>	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 13, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 32, 35, 38, 42, 43, 44
	<b>P3</b>	1, 2, 4, 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33, 42, 43
	<b>P4</b>	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 29, 33, 34, 36, 38, 39, 43, 45, 49
	<b>P5</b>	1, 4, 8, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 28, 33
	<b>P6</b>	5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26, 30, 31, 32, 34, 38, 40, 41, 44, 45, 49
	<b>P7</b>	1, 3, 6, 7, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 39, 40, 42, 44, 46, 51, 53, 54, 56, 58
<b>Valuative-attitudinal</b>	<b>Predisposition</b>	
<i>coping styles or strategies</i>	<b>P1</b>	2, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21
	<b>P2</b>	4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 27, 29, 31, 32, 35, 38, 39, 40, 45, 41, 43, 45, 46, 48
	<b>P3</b>	2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 33, 36, 37, 38, 41, 43
	<b>P4</b>	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 45, 48
	<b>P5</b>	2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35
	<b>P6</b>	2, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49
	<b>P7</b>	4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 45, 46, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58
<b>Interpersonal-relational</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	
<i>social support and commitment</i>	<b>P1</b>	6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 17, 21
	<b>P2</b>	11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 37, 47
	<b>P3</b>	6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 30, 38, 41
	<b>P4</b>	10, 15, 26, 27, 40, 41, 42, 43, 47
	<b>P5</b>	5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35
	<b>P6</b>	9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 35, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 45, 46, 49
	<b>P7</b>	5, 6, 10, 20, 24, 41, 47, 48, 50, 52, 55, 58
<b>Macrosociocultural</b>	<b>Perception</b>	
<i>ready answers and social structure of the culture</i>	<b>P1</b>	10, 11, 15, 17
	<b>P2</b>	3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 23, 33, 34, 36, 37
	<b>P3</b>	12, 13, 21, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38
	<b>P4</b>	25, 29, 30, 35, 36, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47
	<b>P5</b>	7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35
	<b>P6</b>	3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49
	<b>P7</b>	10, 14, 15, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 45, 45, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 58

The process of horizontalization elicits the work definition of religion as GRR used in this research as a **cognitive, emotional, valuative-attitudinal, interpersonal-relational, macrosociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors and thus preventing tension from being transformed into stress.**

However, for better understanding of religion as GRR, it is essential to distinguish here, based on the three peculiar forms of religion<sup>7</sup>, the meanings of spirituality and religiousness. On the base of these forms, **spirituality** is the human dimension, a personal life principle, which transcends the biological, psychological, and social aspects of living, and implies the experience that people have about the meaning of life, God, ways to live, etc. **Religiousness** is a system of organized beliefs and worship which a person or a group practice (1). In other words, spirituality is “*what*” to believe and religiousness is “*how*” to believe.

By the **cognitive** characteristic Antonovsky implies knowledge-intelligence in the broadest cognitive sense to embody “both a storehouse of information about the real world and skills that facilitate acquiring such knowledge” (22, p.107). Being in a constant search of the sacred, human beings always refer to religion as a source of knowledge, which is used for different purposes.

*“Orthodox philosophy is quite useful to fit the society, not to break the law, to have good relationship with people and control your own behaviour (...) I think it would be much better if 90% of people who usually go to church, could understand, why they are there, what do they do, what is Christianity and why it is better to use this philosophy in life”. P2.*

*“Faith fills me, I go to another level, analyze a lot. Here I can clearly say about the role of religion in terms of knowledge”. P5.*

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<sup>7</sup> discussed in the Literature review part of this research project

*“(...) feed my mind and soul, and to understand what I want from life and from society, especially from the society, but not what they want from me. This kind of an attitude makes my life easier in our homophobic society (...) and, strangely enough, but I came to this understanding through the religion, which primarily teaches love (...)” P6.*

**Emotional** characteristic is outlined as ego identity, which “refers to a picture of oneself” (22, p.109). Participants identified their selves as religious, as well as to some extent indolent due to their rare church visits and neglecting of religious prescription. On the other hand, this fact elicits discussed above two subgroups, in which religion is subdivided. Being determinants of worship, church visits and religious prescriptions are related to religiousness, while personal assessment through ego identity and the range of positive feelings experienced by them suggests about spirituality in general. Participants did not have knowledge about these subgroups, adequately referring to the indolence.

*“I consider myself as a religious person, however I don’t, and to be more specific, I can’t live the church life. I am Orthodox and have fear of God (...) I believe in God, but I don’t go to the church every Sunday, don’t attend the Liturgy or morning/evening prayers (...) I can’t get any of these. I know, I always can find a reason for this, but I also know that it should not be like this (...) and when I ask myself why, the answer is only laziness”. P4.*

*“In my understanding, I’m religious. (...) I mean, I adhere to the possible extent the directions, rituals, dogma and rules or commandments, which are prescribed by my religion, I mean Orthodoxy; (...) and how it is, it’s another question, but I try my best (...) Inside I’m trying to, but the factor of laziness is also presented”. P7.*

Participants mostly referred to faith, concretely, to the endowed by religion meaningful and comprehensive answers for the questions they had, as one of the coping strategies. However, being essentially individual, **valuative-attitudinal** factors “may bring to bear in coping with a variety of stressors” (22, p.110). Faith, in other words belief or trust, which is essentially individual character, plays enormous role as

“a plan for behavior, not the behavior that eventually results to cope with the stressor” (22, p.113). In other words, faith serves as a basic ‘tool’ of spirituality, which, respectively, in these people is shaped by religiousness. Such understanding of faith as a ‘tool’ allows combining both subgroups into one notion of religion.

*“My faith and my confessor’s advices always help me to cope with the difficulties in life (...) in self/life-control, making decisions, relations with others, and perception of world in general”. P1.*

*“I had serious problems in my private life because of Love, I was close to suicide, but Love saved me (...) you can call it fear of God or whatever, but for me it is Love (...) this Love protected me and I didn’t commit this stupid act. For that period of my life I found a lot of answers for the questions I had. These answers were so simple, so clear and also genial, that I started to live my life anew and thus much easier (...) I’ve become more staid, started to take the things as they are, have become more calm and peaceful inside”. P3.*

*“All that I have is my faith, which gives me a hand to live my life, to cope with the difficulties in life (...) I pray often, it can be said every day. The prayers let me stay in peace of mind and give me hope for the future. I find some answers for the questions I have, but I’m not looking for the proofs, I don’t need them. It’s all in God’s hands. Awareness of this helps me to live easier, to avoid conflicts, to accept people around me as they are”. P4.*

*“It gives me hope and helps to live on (...) I struggled a lot (...) without any meaning in life, without any reason to live (...) but I coped with this crisis (...) a kind of reborn or revive (...) and each time I feel that I go deeper in life and become stronger (...) I came to this understanding through the religion”. P6.*

*“It is easy for me to defend my point of view because of the knowledge and faith, faith as a conscious belief. I mean, at the beginning was the belief, now it is embodied with the knowledge. Due to this kind of faith I get to know the world much deeper; its’ structure, relationship, statehood, nationhood, patriotism etc.” P7.*

By **interpersonal-relational** characteristic Antonovsky outlines the “extent to which one is embedded in social networks to which one is committed”, i.e. social support and commitment (22, p.116). Being embedded in social network, which is mostly presented as church, participants have a positive attitude to the priests, with some

consideration being given to those ones, who are the good sources for the answers on the question that participants have. In some cases, these sources are confessors.

*"I have very good relations and attitude with the educated, loyal, intelligent priests, and try not to get in touch with fanatic and strict priests". P2.*

*"(...) to the priests am well, don't judge them, but not because of "Judge not, that ye be not judged". No. Just for the reason that, simply, we're all human beings". P5.*

*"I try often to attend the divine service. It gives me hope and helps to live on. I learn a lot in dealing with people and clergy after the service". P6.*

Besides the church, positive side of religion-shaped world view is reflected in the relationships outside as well.

*"It's all in God's hands. Awareness of this helps me to live easier, to avoid conflicts, to accept people around me as they are (...) when someone gives me a slip I try to turn for the other just not to aggravate the situation. This also applies to my internal conflicts, on which some of my decisions are based (for example, my second marriage, my communicating with my child who is no longer a child, and so on)". P4.*

Finally, by **macrosociocultural** characteristics Antonovsky outlines the role of one's culture in providing "ready answers and its social structure" (22, p.119). The fact that religion always played role in the cultural life of society is as old as religion itself.

Religious involvement means nothing but the search for the answers on the issues related to the spiritual search. However, often this search becomes a way of life.

*"I refused to be a gynaecologist, because in the Soviet period, when religion was banned at all, I couldn't refuse to perform an abortion due to my religious beliefs. I feel no regrets. Nowadays my work and my activities are compatible with my faith (...) that is why I am in peace of mind". P1.*

*"This ideology is much understandable and clear for me; I mean dogma and the rituals (...) the wish is important due to the fact that in our religion we are free to will and to choose, as opposed to or in comparison with other religions. For the matter of that, everything depends on us. (...) I can't say that I am in search of sacred. I've found and get to know it". P7.*

Despite the attempt to consider each characteristic separately, the overlapping is obvious, what makes easier to consider religion within the three mentioned categories of GRRs (adaptability, profound ties, and the ties between the individual and his total community).

The second part of the interview guide included the questions for measuring Sense of Coherence, modified from a written questionnaire to an oral interview. Participants were asked to respond briefly. The responses were mostly identical. This interesting fact outlines the common, shaped by the based on religious beliefs world view reaction to the different life-stressors.

*Table 3. Measuring of SOC*

SOC questions	ANSWERS						
	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7
1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	sure	yes
2	sometimes	yes	yes	no	a kind of	yes	yes
3	yes	yes	yes	more yes than no	yes	yes	yes
4	no	more no than yes	yes	no	more no than yes	sometimes	yes/ no
5	yes	not so clear, but yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
6	no	yes/ no	sometimes	more no than yes	no	sometimes	sometimes
7	no	no	only once, not more	not more	no	no	very seldom/ no
8	yes	yes	yes	yes	indifferent	yes	more yes than no
9	no	yes	yes/ sometimes	sometimes	very seldom	sometimes	very seldom/ no
10	never	seldom	almost never	very seldom	seldom/ never	very seldom	sometimes/ seldom
11	yes	sometimes	yes/ mostly	more yes than no	yes/ mostly	yes	yes
12	no	yes/ no	yes	yes	no	sometimes	no
13	see them in right proportion	more right than over	mostly real	more in right proportion	see things as real	more real, depends on the things	more right than over

Thus, the work definition of religion as the GRR is the **essence** of this phenomenological research. This definition outlines clearly the *textural* (a cognitive, emotional, valuative-attitudinal, interpersonal-relational, macrosociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society) and *structural* (that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors and thus preventing tension from being transformed into stress) meanings.

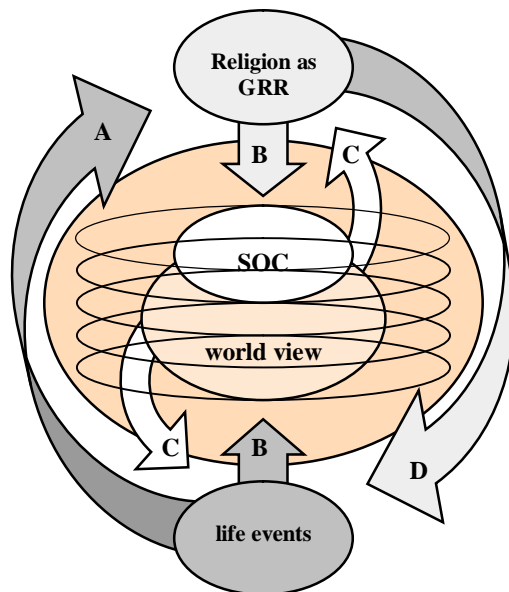
As the essence has been outlined, the most important level of phenomenological reduction is to raise it to the intentional consciousness, i.e. to the research question, which's objectives are: 1) to what degree do people's descriptions of their experience with religion suggest that it contributes to well-being, through its influence on SOC; 2) which aspects of people's experience with religion contribute to well-being, either via SOC or via other paths.

According to Husserl, at this level the meanings 'appearance' and 'appearing' oppose themselves within the 'pure evidence', where the word "phenomenon" means 'appearing', instead of widely used 'appearance', and is a continuing process (46). Deeply understanding of these philosophical concepts is significant, due to this understanding is linked directly with the structural meaning of religion, which is phenomenon itself. Furthermore, such understanding of phenomenon of religion as a continuing process together with the life events leads to the "generalized, long-lasting way of seeing the world and one's life in it" (22, p.124), which is SOC. In other words, each new event can be to some extent stressful. As human beings are open



systems, the individual's world view is not static. It is always shared with others and is shaped by life experience from different circumstances. As the SOC is a “global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected” (22, p.123). Hereby, SOC is world view as well. However, this worldview provides individual with: a) wish to cope (meaningfulness); b) belief that the challenge is understood (comprehensibility); c) belief that resources to cope are available (manageability). Being world view, SOC is not static either. It is constantly replenished by the life events and a variety of GRRs (in this case religion). Graphically it can be presented as a spiral and by putting B-arrows (fig.7).

*Fig.7: Dynamic replenishing of SOC by the recently experienced life events and the GRRs (religion)*



**Key to figure 6**

**Arrow A:** Stressors affect the GRRs

**Arrow B:** Replenishing of SOC by the life events and a variety of GRRs

**Arrow C:** Influence of SOC on GRRs and life events

**Arrow D:** Mobilized GRRs influence on further stressed life events

Religion covers different layers from the cognitive to the macrosociocultural, what is evident from the life history analysis of the participants. In addition, the life history analysis contributes to consider religion within the all mentioned categories of GRRs (adaptability, profound ties, and the ties between the individual and his total community). All this outlines the significant role of religion as GRR, and its influence on SOC, which could be explained by the more or less similar answers in the second part of the interviews. On the other hand, strong SOC mobilizes the GRRs, leading to constant circulation with renewing, subsequently affecting further life events (C-arrows on the fig.6).

Summarizing all written above, the immense role of religion as one of the GRRs is reflected in the textural meaning of religion as a cognitive, emotional, valuative-attitudinal, interpersonal-relational and macrosociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society. It is also evident to what degree do people's descriptions of their experience with religion suggest that it contributes to well-being, through its influence on SOC, by using faith as tool. This influence is reflected in the structural meaning of religion as characteristic that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors and thus preventing tension from being transformed into stress.

It should be outlined the importance of choosing the phenomenology as the most proper approach for this qualitative research. Deeply understanding of the philosophical basics facilitates the work with such complex meanings as religion, the sense of coherence, worldview, life stressors, and health continuum. However, due to limitations of master thesis it is difficult to define the contribution to well-being via

other paths, while the chosen theoretical framework does not limit the possibility for further research.

### ***Validity, Reliability and Generalizability***

According to Green and Thorogood the “validity” of interpretation is the “truth” of that interpretation (45). By qualitative validity Creswell means the accuracy of the findings, while reliability “indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (49, p.190). As the research took place in researcher’s country, interviews were conducted in both Georgian and Russian. On the one hand it strengthens the term of validity, due to the absence of language barrier. However, the accuracy of translating is of the main importance. The member checking was used in order to reduce inaccuracy of the findings. Member checking process, which proved to be decisive, as one participant refused to continue participating in the research, agreed the quotes used in the life history analysis part together with the summaries of interviews with each participant. Hereby, the number of participants was reduced to seven. This issue was important ethically as well. Clearly presented the researcher’s role and the bias, peer debriefed and external auditors enhanced the overall validity of the study (49). Generalization is used limitedly in qualitative research due to intent of this form of inquiry is not addressed for generalize the findings in other group or site (49).

### ***Ethical Consideration***

The ethical issues were considered through all parts of this research. Due to the health related topic and sensitive issue of the data, the researcher applied for an ethical permission from Tbilisi State Medical University Biomedical Research Ethics Committee (App.3). Despite of the fact that the research was conducted in Georgia, the researcher applied for ethical permission from Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD) as well (App.4). However, the necessity of the ethical permission from Patriarchy of Georgia was not obligatory, due to the gatekeeper, but not the participant, role of the priest in this study. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, and were asked for member checking process (App.1). Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were assured that everything that was said would remain confidential. This explicitness facilitated to lessen the risk of a potential psychological harm by discussing sensitive issues that could be painful to recall. However, participants their selves were positively open and provided enormous assistance in creating friendly atmosphere.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Discussion*

Throughout the lifespan human beings are subject to a huge variety of stressors, to which they response by tension. By Antonovsky, the stressor is “a demand made by the internal or external environment of an organism that upsets its homeostasis, restoration of which depends on a nonautomatic and not readily available energy-expending action” (22, p.72). This tension can be negative, which leads to *dis-ease* pole of health continuum, neutral, or salutary that leads to *ease*. Therefore, the direction of this tension within health ease/dis-ease continuum depends on tension management. As the determinants of successful tension management Antonovsky proposes generalized resistance resources (GRRs), such as material, ego identity, knowledge, intelligence, coping strategy, social support, commitment, cultural stability, magic, religion/philosophy, and a preventive health orientation (22, 36).

Studies on the connection of religion to physical health, mortality, morbidity, disability and recovery suggest that religion usually plays positive role (2-6, 18, 24-33). The positive effects of religious and spiritual experience on health are based on a supposition that the experience itself is positive and healthy (24). Religious and spiritual factors as positive emotions might benefit the individual through their impact on neural pathways that connect to the endocrine and immune systems (24, 26, 33). Negative emotions can lead to stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal axis, which are the involved in mobilizing the body's

energy during stress systems (24, 26, 33). Meditation, forgiveness, and certain spiritual thoughts might reduce the arousal in these systems, increasing immune competence and restoring physiological stability (24, 26, 33). Religion has also been associated with some forms of psychopathology, including authoritarianism, rigidity, dogmatism, suggestibility, and dependence (27).

In the process of phenomenological reduction of the interviews from the units of relevant meanings were distinguished five clusters. These clusters (acknowledgement, feeling, predisposition, affiliation, perception) were undergone the process of horizontalization, which elicited religion is a cognitive, emotional, valuative-attitudinal, interpersonal-relational, macrosociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors and thus preventing tension from being transformed into stress. Such an understanding of religion was based on definition of GRR presented by Antonovsky, and was proposed as a work definition for this research. Within the attitude of scientific phenomenological reduction and considering the almost identical responses from the second part of interview that show the common, shaped by the based on religious beliefs world view reaction to the different life-stressors, this definition is the essence of this phenomenological research, which clearly outlines its textural and structural meanings. During the horizontalization of the valuative-attitudinal characteristic emerged the importance of faith as a tool for combining both subgroups (spirituality and religiousness) into one notion of religion.

Returning to the theory and still within the scientific phenomenological reduction, the essence was raised up to the research questions with its objectives. Understanding

phenomena as continuous process facilitated the work with delicate, as well as dynamic matters, such as religion, world view, sense of coherence and health continuum. Religion covers and interweaves different layers from the cognitive to the macrosociocultural that reveals in horizontalization, making possible to be considered through the categories of GRRs, which are adaptability, profound ties, and the ties between the individual and s/his total community.

The sociological aspect of adaptability is “the availability of a complex role set in which the individual has the freedom to enter those roles which he finds suit him best, and the freedom to modify the norms governing those roles in terms of his needs” (36, p.542). For instance, P1, who is a religious person with a strong system of beliefs, who understands the complexity but is motivated to live Church life, considers God as an authentic meaning of life. This consideration induces the ambivalent feelings of obedience, fear and love, genuine religious understanding of which P1 exposes as happiness and unlimited charity. Consequently, has no regret.

*“I refused to be a gynaecologist, because in the Soviet period, when religion was banned at all, I couldn’t refuse to perform an abortion due to my religious beliefs. I feel no regrets. Nowadays my work and my activities are compatible with my faith (...) that is why I am in peace of mind”. P1.*

By the personal assessment P7 identifies own self as religious, with the clear understanding of ideological principles, influence of which is reflected on self-control, self-critics and decision making.

*“This ideology is much understandable and clear for me; I mean dogma and the rituals (...) the wish is important due to the fact that in our religion we are free to will and to choose, as opposed to or in comparison with other religions. For the matter of that, everything depends on us”. P7.*

However, *profound ties* indicate for “a person who has someone who cares for him is likely to more adequately resolve tension than one who does not” (36, p.542). The

relationship to God identified by P3 as a strong constant feeling of love played initial protective and coping role during the harmful consequences experienced in private life .

*“I had serious problems in my private life because of Love, I was close to suicide, but Love saved me (...) you can call it fear of God or whatever, but for me it is Love (...) this Love protected me and I didn’t commit this stupid act. For that period of my life I found a lot of answers for the questions I had. These answers were so simple, so clear and also genial, that I started to live my life anew and thus much easier (...) I’ve become more staid, started to take the things as they are, have become more calm and peaceful inside”. P3.*

Being not well versed in matters of dogma, P4 argues for authentic faith as for unique coping strategy, by using a prayer as a coping tool with everyday-life difficulties.

Faith experience provides the person with the harmonious feelings with the world and people in it that is reflected on the decision making process as well, what leads to happiness, which P4 is grateful.

*“All that I have is my faith, which gives me a hand to live my life, to cope with the difficulties in life (...) I pray often, it can be said every day. The prayers let me stay in peace of mind and give me hope for the future. I find some answers for the questions I have, but I’m not looking for the proofs, I don’t need them. It’s all in God’s hands. Awareness of this helps me to live easier, to avoid conflicts, to accept people around me as they are”. P4.*

The ties between the individual and s/his total community are influential resistance resources. One pointer of these ties might be “the extent to which a society holds as a central value that the society as such, rather than the individual alone, is responsible for dealing with threat, or for assisting the individual to do so” (36, p.542). Being more believer than follower, correlating religious ideologies, P2 considers Orthodoxy as closer despite of its outlined strictness.

*“Orthodox philosophy is quite useful to fit the society, not to break the law, to have good relationship with people and control your own behaviour (...) I think it would be much better if 90% of people who usually go to church, could understand, why they are there, what do they do, what is Christianity and why it is better to use this philosophy in life”. P2.*



Being in a state of a constant internal search and had experienced existential crisis, P6 applies religion as a strategy to cope with personal conflicts and social judgments.

High level of introversion of the person, whose sexual orientation is homosexual and remains undeclared in homophobic society, is presented by continuous retrieval of eternal truths. Explaining this kind of state as retrieval, P6 accentuates the balanced feelings and comprehensible understanding that are provided by religious beliefs.

*“(…) feed my mind and soul, and to understand what I want from life and from society, especially from the society, but not what they want from me. This kind of an attitude makes my life easier in our homophobic society (…) and, strangely enough, but I came to this understanding through the religion, which primarily teaches love (…)” P6*

Shaped by recently experienced life events, the religion as a GRR is characterised by the role in shaping outcome, and a balance between “underload” and “overload” (36). For P6 religious beliefs induce an extraverted behaviour, as the person is motivated to attend the divine service with further communication, where P6 is provided by needed positive and empowering range of feeling.

*“It [religion] gives me hope and helps to live on (…) I struggled a lot (…) without any meaning in life, without any reason to live (…) but I coped with this crisis (…) a kind of reborn or revive (…) and each time I feel that I go deeper in life and become stronger (…) I came to this understanding through the religion (…) I can say that religion gives me right that, what I lack daily: Hope, Faith and Love.” P6.*

Understanding of mentioned categories from the world view of participants contributes to understand another “generalized, long-lasting way of seeing the world and one’s life in it”, which is SOC, and which provides individual with: a) wish to cope (meaningfulness); b) belief that the challenge is understood (comprehensibility); c) belief that resources to cope are available (manageability) (22, p.124). Persons with a strong SOC are likely to identify a greater variety of GRRs at their disposal (36). On the other hand, strong SOC mobilizes the GRRs, leading to constant circulation with renewing, subsequently affecting further life events. In other words, when the persons

perceive themselves and the world, feel themselves as a creator and create something meaningful, feel a sense of support, they have more chances to become healthier physically, mentally, socially, and do not break under the weight of life's trials. Being familiar with the ideological from childhood and having a strong sense of reasonableness, P5 continuously deepens own knowledge about religion. Such an attitude and behaviour provide P5 by comprehensible understanding of Christian way of life as a compassion and altruism, which induce the feelings of appreciation, respect and gratitude to God. Consequently, this positive experience is reflected in continuous sharing by active participating in religious discussions and upbringing of posterity.

*“Faith fills me, I go to another level, analyze a lot. Here I can clearly say about the role of religion in terms of knowledge”. P5*

P7, who experiences strong positive range of feelings during the praying in church, and, consequently, participates in rituals and confesses regularly, considers the life of sin as a limited in terms of freedom. Perceiving God as a source of Perfection, P7 feels no needs for continuing the search.

*“I can't say that I am in search of sacred. I've found and get to know it (...) It is easy for me to defend my point of view because of the knowledge and faith, faith as a conscious belief. I mean, at the beginning was the belief, now it is embodied with the knowledge. Due to this kind of faith I get to know the world much deeper; its' structure, relationship, statehood, nationhood, patriotism etc.” P7.*

Antonovsky considers the absence of a GRR as a stressor, as well as “providers of negative entropy” (22, p119-122). Being well educated in the matters of dogma, and having strong system of beliefs, P7 experience strong existential dependence to faith, which appears in the interview. On the other hand, this kind of dependence as a motivating factor is of main importance for further development.

*“Awareness of the fact that God is everywhere helps a lot. It is like when you wear the uniform, which prevents you from many deeds. With this kind of control you are not inhibited, moreover, by overcoming you feel your inner growth (...) satisfaction. (...) It is a kind of will-training”. P7.*

For P2 church is a place to rest with ability to think about transcendence and sacredness rather than a place for the public rituals, which are not completely understood by P2. Such as introversion together with absence of the confessor, rare involvement in rituals, avoiding religious discussions and the persons with the strict ideas on the one hand, and awareness of God as a part of human beings on the other, allows to think about high level of spirituality.

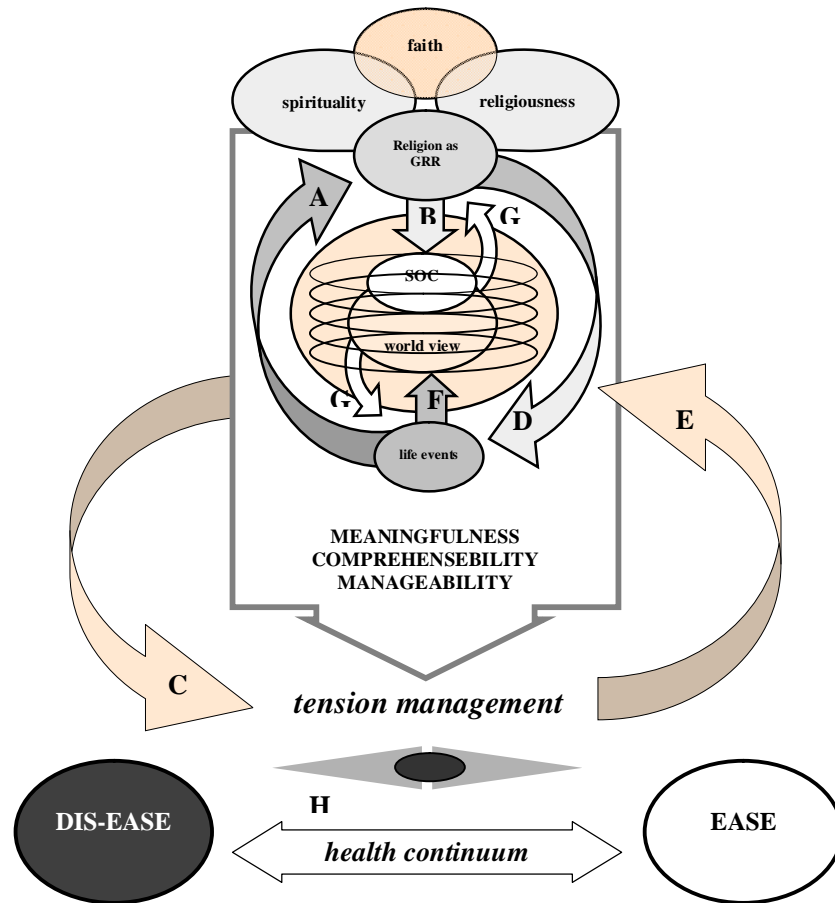
*“(...) especially it’s “dangerous” [P’s emphasis] to be in touch with people with strict ideas (...) as soon as someone tells me “Allah is the only God and Mohammad is his prophet, all other things are Shaitanic”, I stop all discussions with him/her (...) the same is with fanatic Christians which I have met many times”. P2.*

All this outlines the significant role of religion as GRR, and its influence on SOC, which could be explained by the more or less similar answers in the second part of the interviews.

Summarizing all written above, the immense role of religion as one of the GRRs is reflected in the textural meaning of religion as a cognitive, emotional, valuative-attitudinal, interpersonal-relational and macrosociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society. It is also evident to what degree do people's descriptions of their experience with religion suggest that it contributes to well-being, through its influence on SOC, by using faith as tool. Such an influence is reflected in the structural meaning of religion as characteristic that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors and thus preventing tension from

being transformed into stress. Graphical explanation of the discussion part is presented by figure 8.

*Fig.8: Understanding of religion as GRR with its contributing to well-being through SOC*



**Key to figure 8**

**Arrow A:** Stressors affect the GRRs

**Arrow B:** GRRs provide one with sets of meaningful, coherent life experiences.

**Arrow C:** Strong SOC mobilizes the GRRs, which interact with the state of tension

**Arrow D:** Mobilized GRRs influence on further stressed life events

**Arrow E:** Successful tension management strengthens the SOC

**Arrow F:** Life experience shape the SOC

**Arrows G:** Successful tension management maintains one's place on the health ease/dis-ease continuum

**Arrows H:** Influence of SOC on GRRs and life events

## ***Issues and Implications***

Historically, the socio-philosophical concept of health has always been based on the data of natural science disciplines with allowance for the principles of the humanities. Therefore, the world somehow was seen as harmony, not static, but dynamic, constantly changing, which continually striving for its reconstruction and revival. With this sense of “*Panta Rhei*”<sup>8</sup>, the relationship of culture to health beliefs and practices, and the explanations intended for health and disease characterized by those beliefs are perennially complex, dynamic and interactive. Moreover, due to the urbanization and migration processes internal cultural differences can form living side-by-side diverse subcultures. For instance, Jews and Muslims do not eat pork, while Hindus avoid eating beef. The reason why they behave so lies in their system of beliefs, concretely, in religiousness that is a system of organized beliefs and worship which a person or a group practice. Consequently, understanding of why do they practice this system is inherent in spirituality, which is the human dimension, a personal life principle, which transcends the biological, psychological, and social aspects of living, and implies the experience that people have about the meaning of life, God, ways to live, etc (1). Thereby, spirituality and religiousness are incorporated in one broad concept of religion, describing the meaning of which through salutogenic perspective in the lives of Orthodox Christians in Georgia was the purpose of this study. Wittingly, the present study was aimed to describe to what degree people’s descriptions of their experience with religion suggest that it contributes to well-being, through its influence on SOC, and which aspects of people’s experience with religion contribute to well-being. The present research contributes to the existing knowledge

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<sup>8</sup> Heraclitus. “Everything flows”

regarding the connection between religion and health by filling some gaps concerning religion as one of the generalized resistance resources.

Being in a constant search of the sacred, human beings always refer to religion as a source of knowledge applying it for different purposes. Participants identified themselves as religious, as well as to some extent indolent due to the rare church visits and neglecting of religious prescription. Being determinants of worship, church visits and religious prescriptions are related to religiousness, while personal assessment through ego identity and the range of positive feelings experienced by them suggests about spirituality in general. Lack of the knowledge about the subgroups was a result of referring to the indolence.

Participants mostly referred to faith, concretely, to endowed by religion meaningful and comprehensive answers for the questions they had, as one of the coping strategies. Faith takes action as a basic tool of spirituality, which, respectively, in these people is shaped by religiousness. Such understanding of faith as a ‘tool’ allows combining both subgroups into one notion of religion.

People unite in communities and the surroundings make an environment for their everyday life, where “health is created and lived by people...where they can learn, work, play and love” (34). Being embedded in social network, which is mostly presented as church, participants have a positive attitude to the priests, with some consideration being given to those ones, who are the good sources for the answers on the question that participants have. In some cases, these sources are confessors.

Besides the church, positive side of shaped by religion world view is reflected in the relationships outside as well.

Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion states that “health promotion strategies and programmes should be adapted to the local needs and possibilities of individual countries and regions to take into account differing social, cultural and economic systems” (34). The relationship of culture to health beliefs and practices, and the explanations for health and disease, which characterize that beliefs, are able to be seen as highly complex, dynamic and interactive, due to these explanations often involve family, community, and/or supernatural agents in cause and effect, placation, and treatment rituals to prevent, control or cure illness (35). The data collected for qualitative research may be interpreted in different ways, and generalization is used limitedly due to the intent of this form of inquiry is not addressed for generalize the findings in other group or site (49). However, in Georgian context, where 83% of citizens are Orthodox Christians (12), experiencing historical events, which expose a chronic stress, together with the increasing role of the Church and lack of research, such knowledge may be of main importance for enabling individuals and communities to make the decisions, which improve their health.

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## Appendixes

### *App1. Informed Content*

This research project is conducted by George Bejanov, as part of his M.Phil. Degree in health promotion at the Department of Health Promotion and Development at the University of Bergen, Norway. His supervisor for the project is Professor Maurice B. Mittelmark, Head of Department. The aim of this study is to describe the role of religion in the lives of Georgians, as they themselves experience it, as they cope with the day-to day-challenges and opportunities of life.

This study has important because religious life is becoming every more central in Georgia, yet very little research has been done on this subject. Your participation will therefore contribute to improved knowledge about this subject. You may also find value in talking about religion and life, such that the study will benefit, and you may benefit.

If you agree to participate in this study, your name will not be used in written reports (the master's thesis and published articles) and it will not be possible for anyone to identify you as a participant in the study. Whatever you say in interviews will not be passed on to other people. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be used to ensure that your words are recorded accurately, and these recording will be destroyed after the thesis is completed. This project will end on 31 July 2012

If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time or may refuse to answer any of the questions asked of you.

If you agree to participate, please read and sign the statement below.

Thank you for your co-operation,

George Bejanov

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### Written consent

The purpose of the study has been explained to me and I understand what it is about. It has also been made clear that if I agree to participate in the study, my name will not be used and it will not be possible to trace my comments.

I am free to withdraw at any time or may refuse to answer any of the questions asked of me.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***App2. Interview guide***

### ***Life history analysis***

1. Life can have many aspects, including that part of life having to do with one's religious beliefs and practices; to what degree do you think of yourself as a religious person?
2. Do you ever engage in discussions about religion? If yes, with whom? What are the main themes of such discussions?
3. When you have faced really serious challenges, has being religious helped you to cope? If yes, how?
4. What role does Orthodox Christianity play in your understanding of:
  - the world in general?
  - the society?
  - the things that happen to you?
  - controlling them?
5. Does your religion help you decide how to live your life, and help you make difficult choices? If, yes, gives a few recent examples.
6. What is the nature of your relationship to:
  - Church rituals and practices, and to what degree do you participate in such rituals?
  - the clergy?
  - God?
7. What are the most important social activities that you engage in due to your being a religious person?
8. When you think about what it takes to be happy in life, does religion have any importance? If yes, in what ways specifically is religion important?
9. What is very important about religion and faith, in your life, that I should understand?

### ***Measure of Sense of Coherence (short answers)***

Please tell me about how you feel about your life

1. Has it happened that people you have counted on have disappointed you?
2. Do you have the feeling that you don't really care much about what goes on around you?
3. Have you ever been quite surprised by the behaviour of people you thought you knew well?
4. Do you have the feeling that you are being treated unfairly?
5. Until now, would you say your life had clear goals and purpose, or not?
6. Do you have the feeling that you are in a somewhat unfamiliar situation, and don't know quite what to do?
7. Some people tend to feel that they are unlucky in life, compared to other people; have you ever felt this way in the past? (If yes) Have you felt unlucky only once in awhile, or often?
8. Is doing the things you do every day mainly a source of pleasure and satisfaction, or mainly a source of pain and boredom?
9. Would you say that you tend to have very mixed up feelings and ideas, or not?
10. How often do you have feelings that you are not sure you can keep under control?
11. How often do you have the feeling that there is little meaning in the things you do in your daily life?
12. Does it happen now and again that you have very mixed up feelings inside that you would rather not feel?
13. Do you generally see things in their right proportion, or do you tend to over- or under-estimate the importance of things?



## Minutes of the Committee Meeting #30/6

25 October, 2011, 16:00

### AGENDA

**1. Ethical Review of the Research Protocol:** *“The Meaning of Religion in Lives of Orthodox Christians in Georgia. A Salutogenic Perspective”*

**Researchers:** Research project is conducted by **George Bejanov**, as part of his M.Phil. Degree in health promotion at the Department of Health Promotion and Development at the University of Bergen, Norway.

Supervisor: Prof. **Maurice B. Mittelmark**, Head of Department of Health Promotion and Development at the University of Bergen, Norway.

**Committee Members chosen for preliminary evaluation:**

- a. **Temur Silagadze**
- b. **Ramaz Shengelia**

### MEETING PARTICIPANTS

*Committee members:*

- |                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. <b>Givi Javashvili</b>   | 7. <b>Akaki Barkalaia</b>  |
| 2. <b>Guram Kiknadze</b>    | 8. <b>Ramaz Shengelia</b>  |
| 3. <b>Temur Silagadze</b>   | 9. <b>Tamar Kurtanidze</b> |
| 4. <b>David Gelovani</b>    | 10. <b>Irma Manjavidze</b> |
| 5. <b>Magda Betaneli</b>    | 11. <b>Tamar Bakhtadze</b> |
| 6. <b>Bela Mamulashvili</b> |                            |

*Invited persons:* George Bejanov

### RESULTS OF THE REVIEW

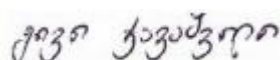
**Item I: Ethical Review of the Research Protocol:** *“The Meaning of Religion in Lives of Orthodox Christians in Georgia. A Salutogenic Perspective”*

#### DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

**Approved without Changes \***

- \* Initially the protocol was approved with conditions. Conditions were as follows: 1. The Consent Form should be developed using simple, easily understandable language (e.g. term “coherence” could be difficult to interpret for participants; also, goals of research should be clearer for research participants). 2. The Research Proposal shall include the following: (a) inclusion and exclusion criteria, (b) the section on confidentiality shall be amended with the statements that in the questionnaires and research results the congregation to which research subject belonged will not be mentioned; also the fact of participation of research subjects in the research project shall be kept confidentially.

Researcher took into consideration the above comments and the amended protocol was approved without changes.

 / Givi Javashvili / Chairman



Maurice Mittelmark  
HEMIL-senteret  
Universitetet i Bergen  
Christiesgt. 13  
5015 BERGEN

Vår dato: 16.09.2011

Vår ref: 27847 / 3 / MAB

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

## TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 30.08.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

27847	<i>The Meaning of Religion in Lives of Orthodox Christians in Georgia. A Salutogenic Perspective.</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	Universitetet i Bergen, ved institusjonens overste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Maurice Mittelmark
Student	George Bejanov

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, [http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk\\_stud/skjema.html](http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html). Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.07.2012, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

  
Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim

  
Marte Bertelsen

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Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

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